

ESC Insight

Unofficial Guide to the 2014 Eurovision Song Contest

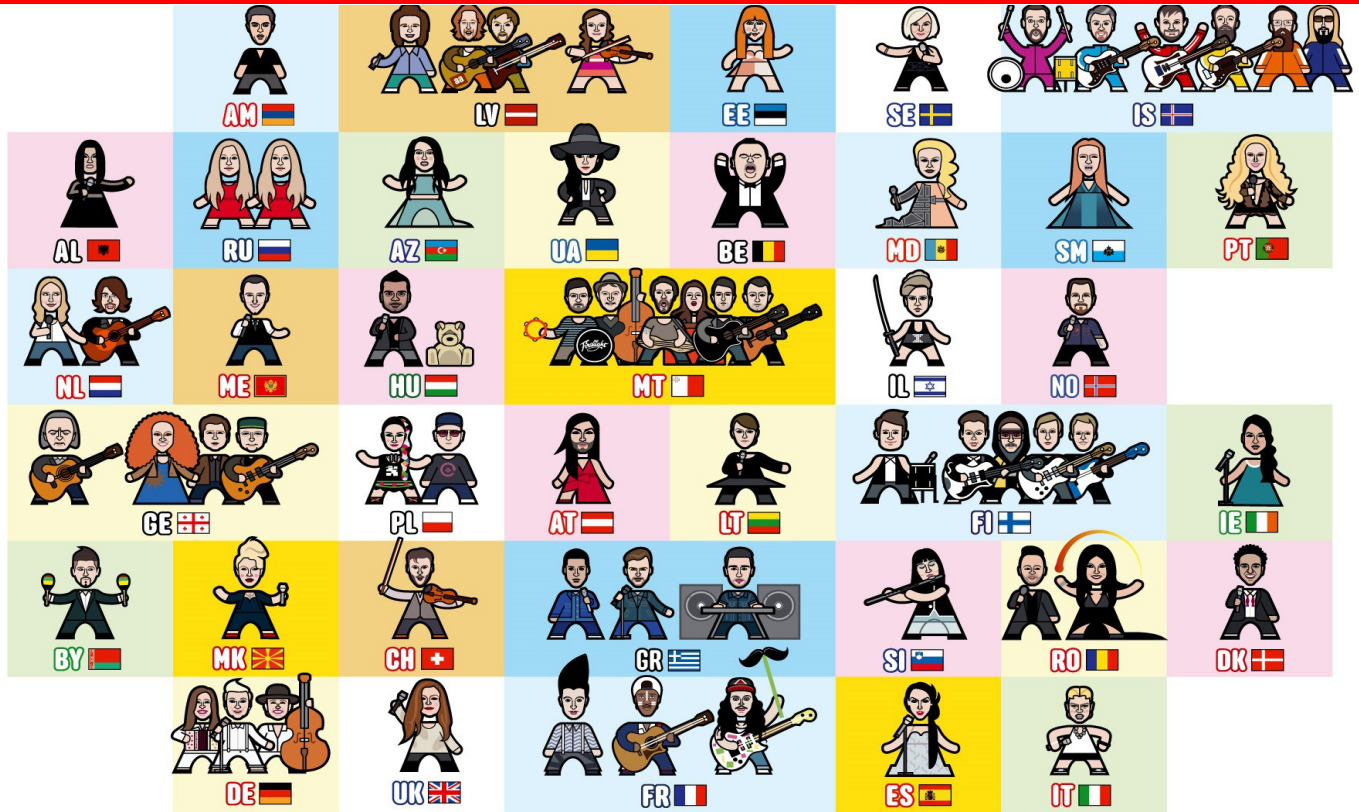


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Foreword

I am honored to welcome the Eurovision Song Contest back to the Danish capital of Copenhagen. Denmark is hosting the 59th edition of the world's favourite music show with an invitation to "Join Us".

We might take for granted that we come together to celebrate music, culture, diversity and friendship. This year, we commemorate the First World War centenary. Europe has come a long way since then, but even today we haven't managed to completely eradicate conflict from this continent. It's a reminder we should cherish and be inspired by the moments when we come together to celebrate our similarities and differences.

This is the third time Denmark and the Host Broadcaster DR invites Europe to this prestigious event.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the team at DR, the City of Copenhagen, the participating broadcasters and the artists who represent the colours of their flag.

Finally, I would like to thank *you*. Together with some 180 million others, you will "Join Us" to celebrate and enjoy the 2014 Eurovision Song Contest. In the end, we do this for you!

I wish you all a great Eurovision Song Contest experience.

Jon Ola Sand
EBU Executive Supervisor
Eurovision Song Contest

Editors Introduction

Ewan's word...

As Whitesnake would say, here we go again (although as with all good jokes involving rock bands, the Eurovision producers will cut them from the script before the broadcast to leave more time for a Sarah Dawn Finer / ABBA cover).

Once more the world comes together to celebrate our differences through the power of song. Once more every country gets a level playing field of three minutes live down the camera. Once more the social networks, the pubs and clubs, the euro-parties, friends and family all join together. Not everyone can be in the same room - it would be a mighty big room to get the EBU's declared 180 million viewers in once place, you would probably need an abandoned shipyard - but the Eurovision Song Contest above all, is about friendship.

So it is with a heavy heart that the ESC Insight team head to Denmark. We might have added to the team over the last year, but with Sharleen staying in Australia the team is still agile, but in a slightly different way. To be honest she's probably going to have a rather unique view of the Contest.

That is what we always strive to bring you. A unique view of the Contest, in our own style. The strapline has always been 'in-depth discussion, editorial, and commentary' and we'll keep on doing that through two weeks in Copenhagen, and then onwards to wherever we end up next year. I understand the Danes are finishing a nice new custom built stadium which should be ready for 2015...

Sharleen's word...

My Eurovision experience for 2014 will be one I haven't experienced in 6 years; I will be staying put in Australia to undertake some important personal development over personal enjoyment.

Like hundreds of millions across Europe and the rest of the world, I will be watching it from the comfort of a lounge room rather than the arena (albeit it at 5am) alongside some friends I am grateful to have made through the overseas Eurovision experience in previous years.

We sometimes forget that for the majority of people, this is the quintessential Eurovision experience. For them, there are no months of preparation culminating in the event and living in a Eurovision bubble. There's no repeated viewing and listening to of songs. For them, each act has just one chance to perform and to win the contest. There are simply just 3 great shows; 11 hours of live entertainment during 1 week in May.

However you choose to have your experience, alone, with friends, in Denmark or your own home, just have fun and I wish you a very merry 2014 Eurovision.

Special thanks to...

Very special thanks once again go to our friend and creative genius Ben Morris for his wonderful minipop illustrations utilized in the guide.

Albania



At a Glance

Song: One Nights Anger
Artist: Hersi
Composer: Gentian Lako
Lyricist: Jorgo Papingji
Performing: Semi 1, 6th

About the Artist

Hersi Matmuja was born on February 1st, 1990. Hersi started her music lessons at the age of eight, taking part in various music events for children. She took music lessons from Professor Luan Bakiu. In 1999 and 2000 Hersi participated in the festival "Çelësi i Artë", followed by the Festival "Ylberi" in Macedonia in 2001, where she won the first prize. In 2002 Hersi participated in the Children Festival of Shkodra with the song *Zogu dhe djali*, and she won the prize "Violeta Filaj" in the competition "Ëndërra për muzikën". Despite being still very young, Hersi has already five times participated in the annual Festivali i Këngës. Her most notable successes to date were the launching of the video clip to the song *Kthehu*, and her collaboration with the singer songwriter Gjergj Leka. She has also participated in two of the most prestigious festivals on the Southern Balkans, Top Fest and Kënga Magjike.

<https://www.facebook.com/hersi.matmuja>

Albania in Eurovision

Appearances: 11
Debut: 2004
Victory: -
Best: 5th
- 2012: Suus, by Rona Nishliu, with 146 points
Semi Finals: Qualified 2004, 2005, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2012.

Recent History

2013: Identitet, by Adrian Lulgjuraj & Bledar Sejko, 15th in the semi with 31 points.

2012: Suus, by Rona Nishliu, 5th with 146 points.

2011: Kenga Ime, by Aurela Gace, 14th in the semi with 57 points.

2014 National Final

Festivali i Këngës 52 was the 52nd annual edition of the Albanian music competition Festivali i Këngës and the 11th time the competition was used to determine the artist and song that will represent Albania at the Eurovision Song Contest, this time selecting their 2014 Contest entry. The competition consisted of two semi-finals on 26 and 27 December 2013 with 16 competitors in total and a final on 28 December 2013, held at the Palace of Congresses in Tirana. Hersi clearly took 1st place with 69 points, 24 points ahead of the 2nd place.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Oh dear. To be fair, the rescheduled Festivali i Kenges was not a rich music source of potential Eurovision winners, but Hersi's number wasn't even the best of that bunch. The traditional Albanian makeover into English and surgical removal of a minute of music to reach the three minute limit offers every FiK winner a chance to improve, but the switch to 'One Night's Anger' is a painful one. The mystery of the song has been lost, the light twinkles of the piano excised, and the subtle guitar sounds incredibly needy. And waltzes don't win Eurovision. If Sharleen hasn't used the phrase 'hot mess' then I will.

Samantha says...

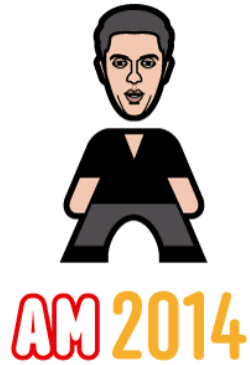
Albania's National Final, "Festivali i Këngës", runs on a different set of rules and standards than Eurovision, so it's almost inevitable that the song that we see win at FiK is changed by the time it gets to the international stage. Rearrangements, edits for time, language swaps: sometimes they work, sometimes they don't. In this case, 2014's revamp does Hersi Matmuja no favours, turning the elegant, emotional waltz we heard in Tirana into a shell of what it was. It's a shame, since Hersi's voice is sweet and unique, but I just wish this vehicle had done her justice.

Sharleen says...

The process that Albania go through almost every year to move from native language to English normally works in their favour, however the entry from Hersi this year has worked in the very opposite way. Whilst I can not understand Albanian as a language, I certainly could understand the emotion and anger coming from her heart as she conveyed pain through her face. Switching to English (which struggles to be understood in delivery), the song has also lost its meaning and emotion. It leaves me confused, and I believe that the average viewer will be feeling this too, so the song will therefore be a one night performance only.

Your Notes

Armenia



At a Glance

Song: Not Alone
Artist: Aram MP3
Composer: Aram MP3
Lyricist: Garik Papoyan
Performing: Semi 1, 1st

About the Artist

Aram Sargsyan was born in Yerevan, on April 5, 1984, and initially chose a profession of pharmacist, graduating the State Medical University of RA. Active involvement in student musical and comedy contests took him on various tours both in and out of Armenia. Getting back home, he was invited to take part in "32 teeth" TV Show, where he did musical stand ups and parodies of famous singers. As singing and music were in his nature, during one of the shows the anchor introduced him as Aram Mp3 to emphasise his particular role in the shows. In 2007, he became the winner of the most popular TV Show of The First Channel of Armenia, "2 stars".

Being noticed for the outstanding and quick success in his career, he was invited to host famous TV Formats such as "X- Factor", "Armenian Idol", "My name is", and "Power of 10", which brought him more fame. Currently he is a member of the most popular "Vitamin Club" project, a comedy show broadcast weekly on Shant TV. Every month Aram gives live concerts with bands in popular music halls of Yerevan singing his own singles and also unique covers of famous hits.

<https://www.facebook.com/AramMp3Official>

Armenia in Eurovision

Appearances: 8
Debut: 2006
Victory: -
Best: 4th
- 2008: Qele Qele, by Sirusho, with 199 points
Semi Finals: Qualified 2006 – 2010, 2013

Recent History

2013: Lonely Planet, by Dorians, 18th with 41 points.

2012: -

2011: Boom Boom, by Emmy, 12th in the semi with 54 points.

2014 National Final

On 24 December 2013, AMPTV announced that Armenia's representative for the Eurovision Song Contest 2014 would be presented on 31 December 2013 during the broadcaster's New Year's Eve program *Big Night Gala TV Show*. During the program, Aram Mp3 was announced as the Armenian representative for Copenhagen. The presentation of the Armenian entry, "Not Alone", took place on 14 March 2014 during a special presentation programme aired on Armenia 1 and hosted by Gohar Gasparyan.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Dark, moody, slow, the opening is everything a Eurovision ballad should be. But it does build up very slowly, and that could be its undoing. That interminable climb up to audio greatness, bringing in the instruments one by one as if it's a tribute to the great Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band works well if you have the complete attention of the listener. Which is something that you don't have at Eurovision if you want to score well.

And then the dub-step kicks in.

Samantha says...

When I heard that Armenia's representative was a showman and television host, I braced myself for a comedy act or maybe John Barroman's cousin in Yerevan (Hovannes Barromanyan?). But when the curtain was raised on "Not Alone", I happily ate my words. The song's arrangement is moving, Aram's vocals intense (almost visceral), and it sounds like no other entry this year. I have no doubts about the song's merit, but voters tend to connect to a "verse-chorus-verse-chorus-bridge-chorus" structure, which this certainly veers from. The song's uniqueness is both a blessing and a curse, but that doesn't keep me from personally loving it.

Sharleen says...

As I write this review, Eurovision in Concert has just occurred and some of the controversy relating to some 'comments' that may have homophobic still linger in the air, and the booing issue is making waves.

But let's get down to the core, which ultimately will decide a winner at the contest - the song and its impression. Remember your first impression of Aram? I do. The song left me breathless with its building emotion and tempo. And instead of dub step beats leaving me cold as Montenegro's 2013 entry did, it left me wanting more. Very few 2014 songs have this appeal. This is a dangerous entry, and whilst I don't think it will actually win, it will come very close to it on the Saturday night.

Your Notes

Austria



At a Glance

Song:	Rise Like A Phoenix
Artist:	Conchita Wurst
Composer:	Charly Mason, Joey Patulka, Ali Zuckowski, Julian Maas
Lyricist:	Charly Mason, Joey Patulka, Ali Zuckowski, Julian Maas
Performing:	Semi 2, 6th

About the Artist

Conchita Wurst was born as Tom Neuwirth on November 6th, 1988 in Gmunden/Austria. The young artist had always dreamed of a career in showbiz. It all really started in 2006 when he took part in the talent show Starmania. In 2007, he joined the boy band "jetzt anders!", which however only survived for less than one year.

He first performed as his alter ego Conchita Wurst, the famous long-haired full-bearded lady, in the talent show "Die große Chance" in 2011. Since then, he certainly has not gone unnoticed in Austria. More recently, Conchita Wurst participated in the ORF production "The hardest jobs of Austria", where she worked in a fish factory, and in "Wild Girls", where a group of candidates had to survive in the deserts of Namibia/Africa together with native tribes.

<http://www.conchitawurst.com>

Austria in Eurovision

Appearances:	47
Debut:	1957
Victory:	1
	- 1966
Best:	1st
	- 1966: Merci Cherie, by Udo Jurgens, with 31 points
Semi Finals:	Automatically qualified to final in 2004, but missed out in 2005 and 2007. Withdrew from 2008. Returned and qualified in 2011. No qualification in 2012, 2013.

Recent History

2013: Shine, by Natalia Kelly, 14th in the semi with 27 points.

2012: Woki Mit Deim Popo, by Trackshittaz, 18th in the semi with 8 points.

2011: The Secret is Love, by Nadine Beiler, 18th with 64 points.

2014 National Final

On 10 September 2013, ORF announced that Conchita Wurst was internally selected as the Austrian representative for the Eurovision Song Contest 2014. Neuwirth previously took part in the 2012 Austrian national final as his alter ego Conchita Wurst, where she placed second with the song "That's What I Am". Wurst submitted five songs to ORF, one of which was selected to represent Austria in Copenhagen. The Austrian entry, "Rise Like a Phoenix", was premiered on Hitradio Ö3 on 18 March 2014.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

If Eurovision was just about the song and the vocals, you would have to consider 'Rise Like A Phoenix' to be a Top Five contender, and Austria to have a realistic shot at hosting the 60th Contest in Vienna. In Eurovision the visuals and the staging are just as important as the music, and that's where the question mark lies. There is no doubt the Wurst can sing like an angel, has the moves of a Basseyian diva, and the bravery to carry this number off live. Can she connect with the audience and the jurors with this soaring and dramatic Hollywood film score number? If she can, then ORF are on course for their best result in the 21st century.

I just wish that the composers had trusted themselves and the EBU and slipped in John Barry's guitar bass line for the last few seconds for that final nod to Bond.

Samantha says...

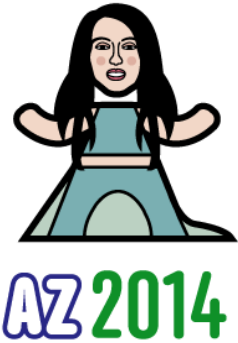
Austria really couldn't have picked a better song for the eye-catching (to say the least) Conchita. A big, dramatic ballad with shades of "Skyfall" is a more elegant and well-thought-out choice than a bombastic drag anthem would have been. Rather than putting the focus primarily on her facial hair, it snaps a viewer back to reality and reminds them that there's actually an incredibly strong performance going on here. Will Conchita's aesthetic choices go unnoticed? Of course not, but she's really not here to be subtle, is she? Qualify or not (and I think this likely will), she's going to be the talk of social media worldwide, much like Cezar and Krista Sigfrids last year, and the Babushki the year before.

Sharleen says...

I'm no fan of the genre, but I am nailing down my opinion that this would be an amazing Bond song, and in the live arena, Conchita delivers the goods like no-one else vocally in 2014. The video of what presumably will be the stage show looks a winner too - sultry lighting, flames, glitter falling from roof. It just wows. If this was anyone else looks-wise, you'd have this down as the favourite. But you can't help but address the white elephant in the room - a large swathe of the public are going to be shocked by her appearance, and perhaps view it as a novelty (potentially Western audiences), or off-putting/offensive (Eastern audiences). Juries who should be judging on the song and performance may also struggle to put their names to a high point score for it too. The difficulty lies in qualifying, but come the final it may just pick up enough momentum in media to hit the top 10. With so few competitors in second semi, I really hope Conchita gets the chance to rise to the occasion at the final.

Your Notes

Azerbaijan



At a Glance

Song: Start A Fire
Artist: Dilara Kazimova
Composer: Stefan Örn, Johan Kronlund, Alessandra Günthardt
Lyricist: Stefan Örn, Johan Kronlund, Alessandra Günthardt
Performing: Semi 1, 8th

About the Artist

Dilara, age 29, began to sing professionally at age of 14. For the last 15 years, she has been experimenting with variety of styles and training her versatile voice. She was introduced to music professionally at the U. Hajibekov Baku Academy of Music. Later on she graduated as an opera singer from Baku Conservatory.

Besides music Dilara has a passion for painting and acting. Her filmography includes *Try, Do Not Breathe* (2006) and *In-between* (2007), where besides acting she has also created a soundtrack *Sonzul Yol*. One of her next planned steps for future is to combine music with acting in musical.

She took her chance in the Azerbaijani national selection as a band member of Unformal in 2008, when the country debuted in the Eurovision Song Contest. The band finished second in the national selection. Later, in 2010, Dilara qualified to the final as a part of a female duo Milk&Kisses. In the same year, she went to represent Azerbaijan at another international music festival *New Wave* in Yurmala, Latvia.

<http://dilara.eurovisiontalents.com/>

Azerbaijan in Eurovision

Appearances: 7
Debut: 2008
Victory: 2011
Best: 1st
- 2011: Running Scared, by Ell and Nikki, with 221 points
Semi Finals: Qualified 2008-2013

Recent History

2013: Hold Me, by Farid Mammadov, 2nd with 234 points
2012: When the Music Dies, by Sabina Babayeva, 4th with 150 points
2011: Running Scared, by Ell and Nikki, 1st with 221 points

2014 National Final

Böyük Səhnə (Big Stage) was an Azeri talent show that selected Azerbaijan's entry for the Eurovision Song Contest 2014. Casting took place in early January, with 3 heats taking place in February and the final on 2 March, where it was announced Dilara was the winner. The song debuted on 16 March.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

My problem with this song is probably unique. Every time I see the title I expect to hear a track called 'Start a Fire' by UK indie singer Jetta. Instead I get a 'worthy' piano-led ballad that does nothing but exist for three minutes. There's no emotional hook, there's no storytelling, it just simply is.

I expect more from Azerbaijan, and after some delightful performances in the selection process, I was expecting a Manic Pixie Dream Girl on stage. Instead we have a Tori Amos clone, and Dilara is more Tori Spelling.

Samantha says...

Knowing how difficult the process was for me, as an American, to get a visa for my trip to Baku in 2012, part of me really didn't want to like this. But Dilara and "Start a Fire" are just so incredibly elegant and soulful, and, this being Azerbaijan, you know that they'll likely bring something special to the stage in Copenhagen. The blending of jazz and traditional Azerbaijani music is a major touchstone of local musical culture, yet this feels accessible to the international masses. Out of all of the ballads in this year's competition, this is probably my favorite.

Sharleen says...

I am now of the opinion that Azerbaijan can put no foot wrong in this contest. Maybe they could teach Latvia a thing or two? They manage to always pull a rabbit out of the hat, in both finding real talent and then matching them with the perfect song. And when no-one is talking about them as a winner, that's when I get the most fearful. Dilara is flying under the radar, even when she proved to be full of personality and had a powerhouse voice in their national selections. This song may not fit some pre-conceived mould of Eurovision with its slow jazzy feel, but come Saturday night I think one would be foolish to discount yet another top 10 placing.

Your Notes

Belarus



At a Glance

Song: Cheesecake
Artist: Teo
Composer: Yury Vashchuk (Teo)
Lyricist: Dmitry Novik
Performing: Semi 2, 10th

About the Artist

Teo's real name is Yuriy Vaschuk. The singer was born on January 24th, 1983 in a small Belarusian town Hidry. His passion for all aspects of music was noticed very early, and after four years of learning to play the accordion, he became the international champion after winning the children's contest *Praleska*. At only seventeen years old, Yuriy was invited to work with the National Academic Concert Orchestra of Belarus under the tutelage of highly-respected conductor Mikhail Finberg. There he gained experience in solo singing, composing and arranging. These practical skills were enhanced by his studies, earning him a degree in Music from the Grodno College of Arts and Belarusian State University of Culture and Arts. Song writing extended into co-hosting the TV programme *Naperad U Minulaa* (Forward To The Past) shown on the Belarus 1 channel.

The lure of pop music composing and performing was becoming harder to resist and he participated in the Belarusian national selection for the 2009 Eurovision Song Contest duetting with the singer Anna Blagova. Eurovision continued to exert an influence, as he co-wrote two Eurovision songs in 2010 (3+2 and *Far Away*), *All My Love* for Alyona Lanskaya in 2012 and again in 2013 with *The Rhythm Of Love*.

<https://www.facebook.com/TEOJuriVashchukCheesecake>

Belarus in Eurovision

Appearances: 11
Debut: 2004
Victory: -
Best: 6th
- 2007: Work Your Magic, by Dmitry Koldun with 145 points
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2007, 2010, 2013.

Recent History

2013: Solayoh, by Alyona Lanskaya, 16th with 48 points
2012: We Are the Heroes, by Litesound, 16th in the semi with 35 points
2011: I Love Belarus, by Anastasia Vinnikova, 14th in the semi with 45 points

2014 National Final

On 15 October 2013, BTRC announced that a national final would be held to select Belarus' entry for the Eurovision Song Contest 2014. A submission period for interested artists and composers was opened and lasted until 24 November 2013. The selected artists and songs competed at the national final which took place on 10 January 2014 at the studio 600 in Minsk, hosted by Olga Ryzhikova and Denis Dudinskiy. The equal combination of votes from a professional jury and the votes from the public resulted in a tie between "Now You're Gone" performed by Max Lorens and DiDyuLya and "Cheesecake" performed by Teo. The tie was resolved after each member of the jury cast one vote for one of the two songs. After an 8 to 0 vote, "Cheesecake" performed by Teo was the winner of the competition and was selected as Belarus' entry in Copenhagen.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

I think the biggest surprise for me (and for Teo) is that he got to keep the same song from the Belarussian National Final and bring it all the way to Eurovision. The man behind Rhythm of Love (replaced), All My Love (Disqualified), and Far Away (3+2 didn't really like it) has finally reached the dizzying heights of a semi-final. Can he go one step further?

Put it this way, if the song was for Norway, yes. But the Belarus tag might weigh him down a little bit more than his rather delicious but heavy choice of dessert.

Samantha says...

Congratulations, Belarus, you've officially found the only slice of "Cheesecake" on the planet that I'd turn up my nose at. Teo has sent a number of songs to previous National Finals as a songwriter, with three of them nearly making it to Eurovision proper (only to be thwarted by the national broadcaster's tendency to swap its entries out), so why has he decided to go to the ESC with his weakest contribution? But just as the smarmiest, sketchiest guy at the bar often ends up with a date on his arm at the end of the night, I can see this racking up more than a few votes from the Robin Thicke fans out there.

Sharleen says...

Capitalising on the hit sound and clip from Thicke, 'Cheesecake' is a lyrically quirky tribute to a stalker.

Instead of sympathising with his plight though I find myself wanting to escape. The performance drips with sleaze-factor, and rather than leaving me amused, it instead leaves me feeling dirty. With few of their friends in the semi for support, its not gonna be a sweet victory for Teo on Thursday night.

Your Notes

Belgium



At a Glance

Song: Mother
Artist: Axel Hirsoux
Composer: Rafael Artesero, Ashley Hicklin
Lyricist: Rafael Artesero, Ashley Hicklin
Performing: Semi 1, 10th

About the Artist

Born in 1982, Axel Hirsoux grew up in the rural town of Courcelles, near Charleroi. His love of music was in his blood even as a child. During his early years he studied music theory for 5 years after which he learned to play the trumpet.

In 2001 he first took part in a singing contest. One year after he met his vocal coach Nell, who took his vocal performance to a higher level and even today he is still working with her. At the age of 23 he registered for the *Star Academy* in France where he just missed out on being selected. But Axel did not give up. In 2007 he sang *Vivo per lei* to an audience of 1500 people with the French star H el ene Segara. Meanwhile, he regularly performed with an amateur group in a performance of the famous musical *Notre Dame de Paris*.

In 2013 he made his debut in the Walloon version of *The Voice*. He ended up in the team of Natasha Saint-Pier but had to say goodbye after the battles. His love for the Eurovision Song Contest encouraged him to enrol in the Flemish national selection show, *Eurosong 2014*.

<https://www.facebook.com/AxelHirsouxTV>

Belgium in Eurovision

Appearances: 56
Debut: 1956
Victory: 1
- 1986
Best: 1st
- 1986: J'aime La Vie, by Sandra Kim, with 176 points
Semi Finals: Auto-qualified in 2004, and qualified in 2010, 2013. Did not qualify between 2005-2012.

Recent History

2013: Love Kills, by Roberto Bellarosa, 12th with 71 points
2012: Would You?, by Iris, 17th in the semi with 16 points
2011: With Love, by Witloof Bay, 11th in the semi with 53 points

2014 National Final

Eurosong 2014 was the national final that selected Belgium's entry in the Eurovision Song Contest 2014. A series of seven televised shows aired in early 2014, and included a panel of 4 expert judges, including Ukrainian 2004 winner Ruslana. 16 acts were initially selected and whittled down through a series of call-backs, and second chances, culminating to the final of just 6 artists on 16th March. With over 57% of the vote, Axel Hirsoux was announced the winner.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

It either falls over like a poor soufflé in the semi-finals and fails to qualify because the general public don't watch the semi-finals (just the fans)... or it makes it into the final and lands a Top Ten finish thanks to a mix of Paul Potts / Susan Boyle magic, or everyone buys the song in the stores and loves it because it's Mother's Day on May 11th across Europe.
Nice timing, Belgium, well played.

Samantha says...

I admit it, I feel more than a bit guilty about spending this Mother's Day in Copenhagen, instead of in New Jersey with my Mom. However, if I send her a copy of this song to tell her how much I love her, I might be written out of the will. Yes, Axel's voice is quite impressive, but the lyrics make him sound more like Norman Bates than a Hallmark Card. And seriously, is that the theme song from "The Young and the Restless"? Sorry, Belgium, but this just does nothing for me.

Sharleen says...

Someone on the net nailed my feelings with one Facebook comment 'This feels like it should be the theme tune to Bates Motel'. There is something underlying creepy to me about an older man singing so passionately about their mother. And whilst the truth may hurt, and I may not personally agree it should be the case, looks do count in a contest broadcast on tv. I don't think this song is going to connect with the audience the way Belgium hopes, and they will find themselves once again left behind in the semi final stage.

Your Notes

Denmark



DK2014

At a Glance

Song: Cliché Love Song
Artist: Basim
Composer: Lasse Lindorff, Daniel Fält, Basim Moujahid, Kim Novak-Zorde
Lyricist: Lasse Lindorff, Daniel Fält, Basim Moujahid, Kim Novak-Zorde
Performing: Final, 23rd

About the Artist

Anis Basim Moujahid (born 4 July 1992), better known as Basim, is a Danish singer and songwriter. He is of Moroccan origin, but lives in Copenhagen, Denmark.

In 2008, at the age of just 15 years old Basim came fourth in the first season of *X-Factor* and since then has become a household name.

After *X Factor*, he started a solo singing career in Denmark with two albums and one EP released: *Alt det jeg ville have sagt* in 2008 and *Befri dig selv* in 2009. Basim will represent Denmark in the Eurovision Song Contest 2014 on home turf in Copenhagen with the song *Cliche Love Song* written by himself.

<https://www.facebook.com/BasimMusic>

Denmark in Eurovision

Appearances: 43
Debut: 1957
Victory: 3
- 1963: Dansevise by Grethe and Jørgen Ingmann, with 42 points
- 2000: Fly on the Wings of Love by The Olsen Brothers, with 195 points
- 2013: Only Teardrops by Emmelie de Forest, with 281 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified 2005, 2006, 2008-2013

Recent History

2013: Only Teardrops, by Emmelie de Forest, 1st with 281 points
2012: Shouldve Known Better, by Soluna Samay, 23rd with 21 points
2011: A New Tomorrow, by A Friend in London, 5th with 134 points

2014 National Final

Dansk Melodi Grand Prix 2014 took place on 8 March 2014 at Arena Fyn in Odense. The winning song was selected in two rounds of voting. In the first round, the combination of viewer SMS voting and a professional jury selected the top three songs to proceed to the superfinal. In the second round, viewers and the professional jury voted again, however, each member of the jury awarded 1, 2, and 3 points to the songs, with 3 points being awarded to the song they preferred the most. The five members of the jury awarded a total of 30 points. The SMS viewer vote was also be translated into 30 points, with each song receiving the proportion of those 30 points based on the percentage of the total votes they earned. Out of 10 songs competing, Basim won with the maximum points from both jury and televote.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Fresh from filming the new series of 'Girl Meets World', Ben Savage grabs a nom de plume and sings some nonsense words to a Bruno Mars B-side. Its all a very fluffy and forgettable three minutes which works well in the moment (and on the all-important recap) but there's nothing substantive to think about, there's no substance to build upon, it's just three minutes of your life you won't get back. Unfortunately with a good (albeit not plum) running order draw, Denmark could easily do the double. And after their forgettable three minutes from last year continuing to haunt the Contest (Rainmaker? Seriously???) I fear Denmark will get to host Eurovision in the purpose built Copenhagen Arena that will be completed this July...

Samantha says...

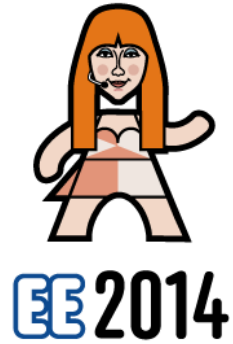
There hasn't been a consecutive winner at Eurovision since Ireland's three-peat back in the mid-1990s, but it looks like Denmark's in the running to take home another trophy. Basim's charming, his song is current and catchy (Bruno Mars, anybody?), and you just know that the audience in the hall will respond favorably to the hometown hero. A return trip to Copenhagen isn't out of the question for 2015, but the question is: can my wallet survive that prospect?

Sharleen says...

I can only call it as I see it, and from the moment I first heard Basim amongst the competitors, I knew Denmark meant business for their year of hosting. Once I saw performed live on stage though? Well, I popped on a bet for it to be Top 3. Basim has since appeared to be nervous on repeat live outings, but what counts is the big night, and with the home crowd advantage and the late draw performing 23rd, he will no doubt storm the show. Can Denmark do the double with this little Bruno Mars-lite ditty? Hell yeah. Will history repeat itself like 2001 for Denmark though with another cliched 2nd placing? More than likely.

Your Notes

Estonia



At a Glance

Song: Amazing
Artist: Tanja
Composer: Timo Vendt, Tanja
Lyricist: Tanja
Performing: Semi 1, 3rd

About the Artist

Tanja started dance lessons at the age of 4, soon convincing her trainer that this long-haired, green-eyed girl who hummed along to every song should also be included in the singing group. Thousands of people have seen Tanja on stage in theatre and musical performances, with her boundless energy infusing such productions as *Chicago*, *Fame*, *The Phantom Of The Opera*, *Snow White*, *Hair* and *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. She is currently starring in *Cabaret* (in which she plays Sally), *The Last Cowboy* (in which she plays Lucy) and *Thriller – Tribute to Michael Jackson*. Tanja almost made it to the Eurovision Song Contest in 2002, as a member of Nightlight Duo, whose upbeat tune *Another Country Song* finished second in the national final before going on to become one of the biggest hits of the year in Estonia.

<http://tanjamusic.com/>

Estonia in Eurovision

Appearances: 20
Debut: 1994
Victory: 1
- 2001: Everybody by Tanel Padar Dave Benton & 2XL, with 198 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2009, 2011-2013

Recent History

2013: Et Uus Saaks Alguse, by Birgit, 20th with 19 points
2012: Kuula, by Ott Lepland, 6th with 120 points
2011: Rockefeller Street, by Getter Jaani,, 24th with 44 points

2014 National Final

On 2 October 2013, ERR opened the submission period for artists and composers to submit their entries, which lasted until 9 December 2013. 189 submissions were received by the deadline - the highest amount since the conception of the Eesti Laul format. A jury selected 20 semi-finalists from the submissions and the selected songs were announced during the entertainment program *Ringvaade* on 12 December 2013. Semi finals were held on 14 & 21 February, and the final held 1 March. Amazing was selected as 2nd to the superfinal of 2 alongside the Super Hot Cosmos Blues Band, however televoting pushed her to 1st when it mattered winning with 53% of the vote.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

It's not Euphoria, in the same way that Missa Miehett Ratsasataa is not Hard Rock Hallelujah. That doesn't mean the fan with limited knowledge of EDM and contemporary dance isn't going to draw the comparison, which is going to muddy the waters for people trying to decide on the merit of this song. And by 'fan with limited knowledge' I'm looking at certain national commentators. Anyway, 'Amazing' is a song that needs to be seen live. The studio versions and YouTube videos do have the melody, music, and words, but the movement and energy that Tanja brings to the performance lift it from run of the mill to a little bit special. As long as the backing singers can carry the main verse when Tanja is thrown in the air, it'll be fine.

Samantha says...

I have to give credit where credit is due: Tanja is an accomplished stage performer in Estonia (having recently played the role of Sally Bowles in the local production of "Cabaret"), and it's immensely difficult to perform modern dance while keeping vocals strong. The stagework on "Amazing" is impressive, but when you remove it from play and focus on the song alone, does it surpass the level of other dance-heavy entrants from this year or the recent past?

Sharleen says...

Lets get this straight, it is NOT a straight out 'Euphoria' in so many ways. The song does not sound like the 2012 winner. But there will ultimately be some comparisons to that songs staging (in that has some modern dance elements featuring a partner mirroring actions of the singer). That was certainly my first impression as a fan. But I was also impressed by the vocal ability and staging at the same time. If we compare to Loreen, we might be clouding judgment and not measuring the song adequately as an average viewer. Therefore I feel Tanja is far too underrated right now. This could be a contender - its memorable as a song and performance, and could shock with a top 10 (and potentially top 5) on Saturday.

Your Notes

FYR Macedonia



At a Glance

Song: To The Sky
Artist: Tijana
Composer: Darko Dimitrov, Lazar Cvetkoski
Lyricist: Elena Risteska Ivanovska, Darko Dimitrov
Performing: Semi 2, 11th

About the Artist

Tijana Dapčević was born into a music family in Skopje. Her father is a music professor, her mother was an opera prima donna and her sister Tamara is also a popular singer from F.Y.R Macedonia. Tijana started to play cello when she was seven years old. She graduated from the faculty of Music in Skopje where she got profession of a cello teacher. Tijana played in the Macedonian Philharmonic Orchestra and in the international orchestra of Leipzig. Her media career began in 1993 when she started her work on the F.Y.R. Macedonian Radio and TV. Tijana's breakthrough in her pop career began in 1994 when the singer revealed her first hit. Afterwards, she has published five music albums and recorded many songs with a lot of regional pop stars. Besides pop music, Tijana is engaged as a theatre actress.

<https://www.facebook.com/TijanaDapcevic?fref=ts>

FYR Macedonia in Eurovision

Appearances: 14
Debut: 1998
Victory: -
Best: 12th
- 2006: Ninanajna by Elena Risteska, with 56 points
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2004-2007, 2012

Recent History

2013: Pred Da Se Razdeni, by Esma & Lozano, 16th in the semi with 28 points
2012: Crno I Belo, by Kaliopi, 13th with 71 points
2011: Rusinka, by Vlatko Ilievski, 16th in the semi with 36 points

2014 National Final

On 28 August 2013, Tijana Dapčević was announced as the Macedonian representative for the 2014 Eurovision Song Contest during the MRT evening news programme *Dnevnik*. Earlier in November 2013, Dapčević had announced that the entry would be called "Pobeda" (Victory), however the title was later revealed to be the working title for the song. Dapčević received over fifty songs from composers across the Balkan region but favoured the three songs she received from Darko Dimitrov. The presentation of the entry took place on 22 February 2014 during a special edition of the MRT programme *Hit na mesecot* (Hit of the Month), hosted by Aleksandra Jovanovska and Marko Mark.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Oh dear. Eurovision is not just about the Song (which just about holds up, with a touch of retro charm), but it's about the visuals. I don't think that at a fundamental level Macedonia get that. The debut of the song was the poorest visual reveal of any of the songs this year. The video doesn't do much better. And while Tijana has a commanding stage presence, it's one marked by 'alpha-female' and not 'dream pixie girl.' And don't get me started on how mis-targeted and dated the focus on on white-rimmed Joe 90 glasses is.

A nice effort in the song department, but every other area is lacking.

Samantha says...

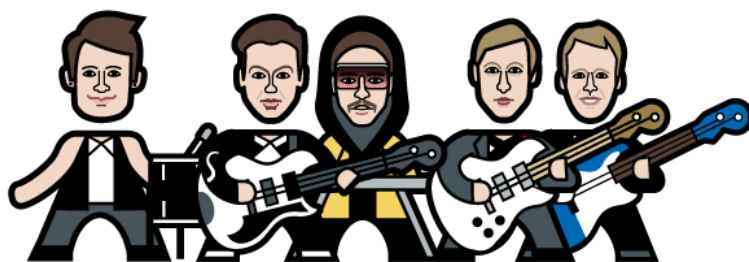
For those of you looking for the classic Eurovision sound (that is, an inoffensive pop track that works just as well on screen as it would on the club), "To the Sky" might be just what you need in this semifinal. Tijana's a well-established performer in the region, but in a year where so many Balkan nations have withdrawn, she may have her work cut out for her. Win or lose, you can bet I'll be out on the dance floor when this starts playing.

Sharleen says...

Tijana, despite her preview video of drag queen-esque miming, has the live vocal chops to blow her younger competitors off the stage ala Kalopi back in 2012. What she unfortunately doesn't have is the fortunate of a contemporary sounding song; more like an early 1990s dance tune; which in my mind puts her entry 'To the Sky' on the backfoot for qualification. Through in the issue of a lack of friends to support her unwaveringly, I fear our Macedonian friends will be back on the plane come Friday morning.

Your Notes

Finland



ESC 2014

At a Glance

Song: Something Better
Artist: SoftEngine
Composer: Topi Latukka
Lyricist: Henri Oskár, Topi Latukka
Performing: Semi 2, 8th

About the Artist

Softengine was formed in the city of Seinäjoki in the summer of 2011, at the cottage of the grandparents of singer/guitarist/songwriter Topi Latukka. They came to their present line-up in the summer of 2013, after diligent songwriting, practising, gigging and success in band competitions.

Their promising career took a sharp upturn when they signed a recording contract with Sony Music Finland early in 2014 and a couple weeks later hit the jackpot by winning the UMK. The decision to enter the contest was made at the last minute and it took the boys ten days to finish their entry *Something Better*. It is composed by singer Topi Latukka and the lyrics are by Latukka and keyboardist Henri Oskár.

<https://www.facebook.com/softengineband>

Finland in Eurovision

Appearances: 48
Debut: 1961
Victory: 1
- 2006: Hard Rock Hallelujah by Lordi, with 292 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2006-2011, 2013

Recent History

2013: Marry Me, by Krista Siegrids, 24th with 13 points

2012: När Jag Blundar, by Pernilla, 12th in the semi with 41 points

2011: Da Da Dam, by Paradise Oskar, 21st with 57 points

2014 National Final

Uuden Musiikin Kilpailu, 2014, was the third edition of the Finnish national selection that selected Finland's entry for the Eurovision Song Contest 2014. On 10 July 2013, Yle opened the submission period for interested artists and composers to submit their proposals to the broadcaster, which lasted until 16 September 2013. A total of 420 entries were received, of which 12 were ultimately be selected to compete by a special jury. Three introductory shows starting in December, two heats and 2nd chance round whittled the songs down to 8. The final with the remaining finalists took place at the Barona Areena in Espoo on 1 February 2014. SoftEngine won with 23.28% of the final vote.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

The point of any arena-based rock number is the moment when the strobe lights flood the audience, the guitars hit the power chord, and every fist that can hear a speaker punches the ear in a reflex action. If you can sell that moment in your indie-guitar schlock, then you have a chance.

Certainly in the studio and on the video Softengine's vocals and instruments lead up to that moment on the refrain 'all these words'. Where other songs have three minutes to sell the package, Finland's young rockers with their first single and very little concert experience have just one moment to achieve qualification. Can they sell the punch the air moment?

For me, they've *never* managed it, either stumbling over the lyrics, not signalling it musically, and never selling it during the moment. It's great that the new music contest in Finland finds bands like softengine, but they are new and untested. I fear they will be found wanting.

Samantha says...

One of the few rock-oriented entries this year, Finland's Softengine serve up an anthemic track with mature, deep lyrics that could easily be imagined as a recording by Coldplay or Keane.

Groundbreaking? Not really. Entertaining and inoffensive? Sure! And, as many recent winners show, it's the universally-appealing songs that tend to do well on the scoreboard. These guys are young (the eldest is 20, the youngest only 17), energetic (well, by Finnish standards, anyway), and rather talented, considering their relative inexperience. Could be a dark horse.

Sharleen says...

Not the most popular choice as winner in their home country, young band Softengine may end up being the right choice for this years contest. Whilst their inexperience shows on stage and in delivery, the song is anthemic enough and builds nicely to be memorable in a way that is reminiscent of Denmark's 'A New Tomorrow' back in 2011. I am not predicting a similar result however, but they should qualify comfortably and ultimately get 'something better' than yet another bottom 5 at the final.

Your Notes

France



At a Glance

Song: Moustache
Artist: Twin Twin
Composer: Pierre Beyres, Kim N'Guyen
Lyricist: Lorent Ardouvin, François Ardouvin
Performing: (finalist, position tba)

About the Artist

Twin Twin drew critical attention early on for the panache of their songs and extravagant style, which drew from both scenes of the everyday in Paris and from the high society environments of fashion and the performing arts.

They breathe creativity wherever they go, seducing some of the most important artists along the way (they've crossed paths with Nina Hagen, VV Brown, Stromae, Catherine Ringer, and M, just to name a few). In no time, they've been invited to perform at the largest music festivals in France and around the world, playing concerts in Colombia, Canada, Spain, Belgium, and elsewhere.

<https://www.facebook.com/twintwinohyeah>

France in Eurovision

Appearances: 57
Debut: 1956
Victory: 5

- 1958: Dors mon Amour by Andre Cleaveau, with 27 points
- 1960: Tom Pillibi by Jacqueline Boyer, with 32 points
- 1962: Un Premier Amour by Isabelle Aubret, with 26 points
- 1969: Un Jour Un Enfant by Frida Boccara, with 18 points
- 1977: L'oiseau et l'enfant by Marie Myriam, with 136 points

Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Auto-qualify (Big 5)

Recent History

2013: L'enfer Et Moi, by Amandine Bougeois, 23rd with 14 points

2012: Echo (You and I), by Anggun, 22nd with 21 points

2011: Sognu, by Amaury Vassili, 15th with 82 points

2014 National Final

On 4 November 2013, France 3 announced that it would organise a national final in order to select the French entry for the Eurovision Song Contest 2014. In early October 2013, France 3 initiated a casting call for interested artists to submit songs with the criteria that the majority of the lyrics of the submitted song be in French and that instrumental pieces that extensively lacked vocals would not be accepted. The deadline for submissions concluded on 24 November 2013. On 27 November 2013, Destan, Joanna and Twin Twin were revealed as the artists that would compete at the national final. The three candidates presented their entries in a special edition of the French television program *Les chansons d'abord* on 26 January 2014. The result of the national final was announced on *Les chansons d'abord* on 2 March 2014.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

It's utterly mad. I love it when an act commits one hundred percent to who they are, with no diluting their impact because they are taking to the Eurovision stage. Wrapped up in gallic superiority and impeccable stage-craft, they know what they want to do, and don't seem to care about the 'typical playbook' at the Contest.

Good.

It's honest and refreshing, and you can sense that they are enjoying themselves with the music, and while they hope you enjoy it, it's really all about them. How very French.

More of this please!

Samantha says...

France's Eurovision entries have the uncanny ability to jump around the musical spectrum, yet still sound unmistakably French. Recently, we've heard smoky blues-rock, Corsican-language opera, jazz chanson, and zouk, but you can always tell where it came from. This year, we have three young men pining for facial hair. The song's energy is infectious, the beat is danceable, but it might simply be too offbeat for the average ESC voter.

Sharleen says...

I love this song. It has a real energy both in beat and in performance that it should have the crowd behind it in the clubs, and jumping at the arena as well. It has real potential to become a radio hit for Twin Twin across Western Europe. But putting personal thoughts aside, it's hard to know the role of such a summery, lightweight, novelty song in today's song contest. My feeling - the public will televote their little hearts out for France, but the more serious-seeking jury vote will negate any chance of a left hand side of scoreboard result.

Your Notes

Georgia



GE 2014

At a Glance

Song: Three Minutes To Earth
Artist: The Shin & Mariko
Composer: Zaza Miminoshvili
Lyricist: Eugen Eliu
Performing: Semi 2, 4th

About the Artist

The Shin is a Germany-based band that became famous for their creative ways of interweaving traditional Georgian music with influences from pop and world music. For their performance in the 2014 Eurovision Song Contest they are joined by vocalist Mariko Ebralidze.

Mariko Ebralidze was born in 1984 in Tbilisi. She graduated from a music school, piano department, and in 2000, she was enrolled at #2 Music College named after Zakaria Paliashvili pursuing the speciality of a pop singer. In 2008, she received a bachelor's degree as a soloists and taught from the Pedagogical Institute of Music Arts. Until 2013, Mariko Ebralidze participated in several high-ranked festivals in Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Germany.

<http://www.facebook.com/EurovisionGeorgia>

Georgia in Eurovision

Appearances: 7
Debut: 2007
Victory: -
Best: 9th
- 2011: One More Day by Eldrine, with 110 points
- 2010: Shine by Sopho Nizharadze, with 136 points
Semi Finals: Qualified 2007, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2013

Recent History

2013: Waterfall, by Nodi & Sophi, 15th with 50 points
2012: I'm a Joker by Anri Jokhadze, 14th in the semi with 36 points
2011: One More Day by Eldrine, 9th with 110 points

2014 National Final

During a press conference at GPB's Assembly Hall on 4 February 2014, the 2013 Georgian Eurovision entrants Nodiko Tatishvili and Sophie Gelovani announced that The Shin together with Mariko Ebralidze had been selected to represent Georgia. The presentation of the entry occurred on 14 March 2014.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

I will defend the fusion-jazz-folk-ska number that is 'Three Minutes to Earth' every single minute when I'm in Copenhagen. It's inventive, layered, moves away from the standard A B A B tonic B structure you find in the cookie cutter pop songs, and it's a song that continues to reward you every time you listen to it. What I can't do is argue that it's the right song to send to Eurovision. Fans aside, you have arguably one shot on the stage to impress the public. If the only people voting were the music reviewers at The Guardian then it might have a shot. Unfortunately the general public are in with an influence, and they're going to see the second biggest hot mess after Israel.

Samantha says...

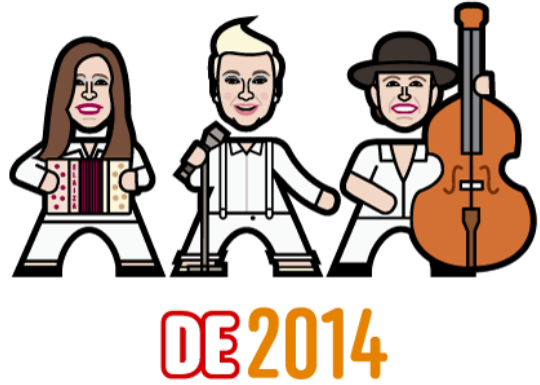
Even back in the 1960s and 1970s, hippie-inspired jazz-fusion almost never appeared at Eurovision, so I have to give the Georgians credit for trying something so different. Rather than reaching for a classic ballad or big production number, they appear to be giving us a deleted scene from "Hair". I really doubt this will send us to Tbilisi or Batumi next year, but good on them for breaking the mold. Hey, where did all this patchouli come from? And is anybody else reeeeeeeally hungry all of a sudden?

Sharleen says...

I am sure in amongst this mess of classical and jazz guitar and hippie musical 'Hair' tribute that there is a redeeming feature to mention. Perhaps the positive is that Georgia proclaimed that they were entering in 2014 after previously struggling financially to send an entry, and at least this entry will guarantee they don't need to worry about paying a hotel bill after the second semi final.

Your Notes

Germany



At a Glance

Song: Is It Right
Artist: Elaiza
Composer: Elzbieta Steinmetz, Frank Kretschmer
Lyricist: Elzbieta Steinmetz, Adam Kesselhaut
Performing: (finalist, position tba)

About the Artist

Elaiza (Ela-i-sa) is the new female German act evolving around singer-songwriter Ela Steinmetz. Ela's Ukrainian-Polish background clearly influences her songwriting and singing. The band already won the best newcomer award at the Women of the World festival 2013 in Frankfurt.

The band consists of singer-songwriter-pianist Ela, accordionist Yvonne Grünwald and contrabassist Natalie Plöger. The young trio managed an incredible surprise by first gaining a "wildcard" for the German national final out of more than 2200 acts that had applied via Youtube, and then by winning the German ticket to Copenhagen against seven of the most famous acts of the German music scene.

<https://www.facebook.de/elaizamusic>

Germany in Eurovision

Appearances: 58
Debut: 1956
Victory: 2
- 1982: Ein Bisschen Frieden by Nicole, with 161 points
- 2010: Satellite by Lena Meyer-Landrut, with 246 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Auto-qualify (Big 5)

Recent History

2013: Glorious, by Cascada, 21st with 18 points
2012: Standing Still, by Roman Lob, 8th with 110 points
2011: Taken by a Stranger, by Lena Meyer-Landrut, 10th with 107 points

2014 National Final

Unser Song für Dänemark (Our Song for Denmark) was the competition that selected Germany's entry for the Eurovision Song Contest 2014. The German national final took place at the Lanxess Arena in Cologne on 13 March 2014. The national final featured the eight competing artists performing their songs with the selection of the winning entry occurring over three rounds of public televoting: the first round reduced eight artists to four, the second round reduced four artists to two and the third round resulted in the selection of the winning artist and song. Elaiza won against famous act Unhelig, with 55% of the televote.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

One of the issues in turning National Finals towards the X-Factor personality mode of broadcasting, as opposed to a competitive singing environment, is that many people will be voting on the story and spiritual journey of the performer, rather than the performer themselves.

I suspect this is the case with Eliaza, who entered the German National Final wild card round, won through over 2000 songs to win the televised final, and then went on to win the Grand Final vote over bigger and more accomplished names. Was it the song that won, or the televisual language of 'David vs Goliath' and reality tv 'plotlines'? I suspect the latter.

Without 'the story' at Eurovision (no matter what DR say about the thirty second postcards), you can only judge the performance... and live it is found lacking.

Samantha says...

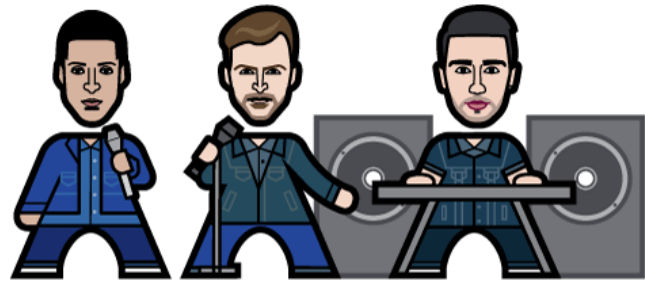
Blending Eastern European folk motifs with a touch of indie-rock, newcomers Elaiza shocked the German public by beating seven other well-known acts to win their National Final. Despite their youth and relative inexperience, the girls have their own unmistakable style, and while it might not be the song that gets you up and dancing tonight, you'll likely find yourself bobbing along to its almost reggae-like beat.

Sharleen says...

This does have something going for it. It could be the behind the scenes story of how Elaiza managed to win in Germany, the fact that the accordion player makes me want to switch sides, or the lovely little fireworks that go-off at the start of every chorus. For me, its everything but the song itself, which is a nice little toe-tapper that goes in one ear and out the other, leaving me feel nothing but cold at the end. Its fine on first listen (which is good for Eurovision), but lacks any charms, memorable moments and a need for wanting to hear it more. And that is why I doubt the judges or televoting public alike will remember to vote for Germany in 2014.

Your Notes

Greece



GR 2014

At a Glance

Song: Rise Up
Artist: Freaky Fortune feat. Risky Kidd
Composer: Freaky Fortune
Lyricist: Freaky Fortune
Performing: Semi 2, 13th

About the Artist

Freaky Fortune are Nikolas Raptakis and Theofilos Pouzbouris. Both 23 years old, both studied music since their early years. Theofilos plays the guitar and piano and owns a degree on theoretical music studies and music history, while Nikolas still takes vocal coaching lessons in the National Greek School of Music and composes with Theofilos all their songs. Their breakthrough in the global Internet community was a cover on the Perez Hilton's cover competition. Freaky Fortune *Part Of Me* (Katy Perry cover) was announced as a brilliant work by the Greek duo and the most "deadly" blogger on earth, Perez Hilton launched their fame across the music industry. After their first success, in 2011, Freaky Fortune released three top-chart singles with top Greek artists.

RiskyKidd is a 19 years old rapper, born and raised in London, by his Jamaican mother and German father. His actual name is Shane Schuller. As growing up in a multicultural environment with many and different music influences and experimental beats, RiskyKidd developed, since his high school years, his unique way of expressing in music, lyrics and rap. The past four years he is a Greek resident and his name got well known after his co-operation with Playmen and Helena Papparizou (Greek Eurovision Winner 2005) in the international hit *All Time*.

<https://www.facebook.com/RiseUuup>

Greece in Eurovision

Appearances: 35
Debut: 1974
Victory: 1
- 2005: My Number One by Elena Papparizou, with 230 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified 2004-2012

Recent History

2013: Alcohol is Free, by Koza Mostra, 6th with 152 points

2012: Aphrodisiac, by Eleftheria Eleftheriou, 17th with 64 points

2011: Watch my Dance, by Loucas Yiorkas feat. Stereo Mike, 7th with 120 points

2014 National Final

On 11 February 2014, DT and MAD TV officially announced the four acts that would take part in a national final. All four acts were signed to the record label *Panik Records* or its imprint *Platinum Records*. The national final took place on 11 March 2014 at the Acro Music Hall in Athens. The winner was selected via 50% public televoting/SMS and 50% internal jury. Freaky Fortune won with 36.83% of the vote.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

It's modern, it's catchy, and without any names or identifying flags, you would know this is Greece. For all the last minute nature of NERIT's entry into the 2014 Song Contest, for the short term 'we need a National Final' and let's call it "A MAD Show" (after the broadcaster, not the contest), Greece have turned up trumps.

Again.

How is it that the default position for Greece is 'cracking song' and everyone else is 'crackers'? Even the second placed national song (Kostas Martikas) reeked of quality.

Samantha says...

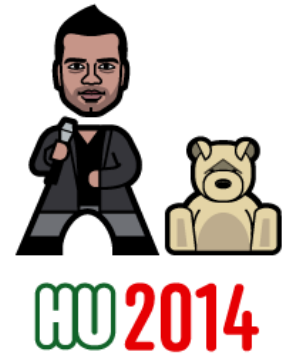
I have to hand it to the Greeks. In a year where they could have withdrawn due to funds or a lack of broadcaster, they come to the international stage with a fun, bouncy, internationally-appealing bit of ethno-pop. Reminiscent of songs like "We No Speak Americano", "Bom Bom", and "Party Rock Anthem", this has some major potential to do some damage on the scoreboard. If you're looking for a radio-friendly song to support, this might be what you've been looking for. The only thing that gives me pause is the fact that in the studio version, the vocals are somewhat autotuned, which can't be done at Eurovision proper. We'll see how the Greeks roll with the punches.

Sharleen says...

I would ordinarily discount such dance-based music as having a great potential of live mess up, but when its Greece delivering the goods, you can't write it off so quickly. Additionally, Eurovision doesn't have the greatest history for white boy rapping. The only one that comes to mind that has done well in the recent past, is in fact, from Greece (2011)! And based on all this, and the sheer fact that this is a far more accessible and catchy tune than most in 2014, I am expecting a very fortunate result for 'Rise Up' at the final - I am certain that this is in the Top 10.

Your Notes

Hungary



At a Glance

Song: Running
Artist: András Kállay-Saunders
Composer: András Kállay-Saunders, Krisztián Szakos
Lyricist: András Kállay-Saunders
Performing: Semi 1, 16th

About the Artist

András Kállay-Saunders was born on January 28, 1985 in New York City to Hungarian model Katalin Kállay and American soul-singer and producer Fernando Saunders. Autumn of 2009, Kállay decided to visit Hungary to reunite with his mother as well as spending quality time with his grandmother. During his visit, he noticed a TV commercial urging talented singers to audition for the nation's talent competition Megasztár. Kállay finished fourth in the contest but gained a life-changing experience. He realised the doors were opened toward making a life-long dream come true with hard work and dedication. He went on to sign with Universal and permanently resided in Hungary. In 2012, Kállay entered the Hungarian Eurovision national selection show *A Dal*, but he unfortunately came short of the finals. During this competition, he developed a pride towards one day bringing the big stage to the country that opened doors to his dream. In 2013 he entered *A Dal* again with his single *My Baby* and reached 2nd place.

<https://www.facebook.com/kallaysaundersofficial>

Hungary in Eurovision

Appearances: 12
Debut: 1994
Victory: -
Best: 4th
- 1994: Kinek mondjam el vétkeimet? by Frederika Bayer, with 122 points
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2005, 2007, 2011, 2012, 2013

Recent History

2013: Kedvesem, by ByeAlex, 10th with 84 points
2012: Sound of our Hearts, by Compact Disco, 24th with 19 points
2011: What About My Dreams?, by Kati Wolf, 22nd with 53 points

2014 National Final

Dal 2014 was the third edition of the Hungarian national selection that selected Hungary's entry for the Eurovision Song Contest 2014. On 10 October 2013, MTV confirmed Hungary's participation in the 2014 Contest and opened the submission period for interested artists and composers to submit their entries until 1 December 2013. At the close of the deadline, a record 435 submissions were received of which thirty were ultimately selected for the competition by a ten member selection panel. The selection started in January, and the final held 22 February with 8 songs. Andras won with 30 points, 4 over 2nd placed Bogi.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Trigger warning.

The video magnifies it, but the issue song that is 'Running' is powerful stuff. Perhaps too powerful for a family audience. Unless you are really focusing on the lyrics, it might slip by you in a straight ahead solo performance. I can't call this one till I see the stage show in Copenhagen.

But, if a video or a performance at Eurovision needs a 'trigger warning', is it appropriate?

Samantha says...

A handsome face, a fantastic voice, a modern arrangement...all for a song about the heartbreak of child abuse. "Running" carries a message that needs to be heard, but András walks the fine line between being a storyteller and simply a downer. Musically, this has the potential on paper to bring us to Budapest next year, but will the subject matter push people away, or get them talking?

Sharleen says...

I think this is the most divisive song of this years contest. The tone of the lyrics – will the audience appreciate the dark topic that it covers? I could argue either way. I do think Andras deserves a very good result with his excellent delivery and song with a message, BUT as soon as that awkward drum and bass beat kicks in it has me doubting everything. Something about that chorus puts me off, and when you compare it to the most-similar artist in the contest (Armenia), I find Hungary lacking. I have heard people either proclaim they love or hate it, and those that love it are calling it a winner. I personally *can* picture the credits rolling over the song as a winning reprise. So very hard to call, but with a favourable draw on Saturday and placed far away from its nearest soundalike, a top 5 is not a bad bet.

Your Notes

Iceland



At a Glance

Song: No Prejudice
Artist: Pollapönk
Composer: Heidar Orn Kristjansson
Lyricist: Heidar Orn Kristjansson, Haraldur Freyr Gislason,
John Grant
Performing: Semi 1, 5th

About the Artist

Pollapönk were founded in 2006 by guitarists Haraldur Freyr Gislason and Heidar Orn Kristjansson of the Icelandic post-punk trio Botnledja.

Haraldur Freyr and Heidar Orn are childhood friends who have been playing and writing music since their early teens. They formed the band Botnledja and entered the local music contest *Battle of the Bands* in 1995 and ended up winning it. Their first ever album *Drullumall* went gold; they were chosen as Best Newcomers at the Icelandic Music Awards in 1995, and as Best Rock Group in 1996 and 1998. They made five albums and two were chosen as the Album of the Year. Botnledja changed their name to Silt in 1997. They toured Europe supporting Blur and opened for Prodigy, Suede, Pulp and Sparta. Botnledja participated in *Söngvakeppnin*, the Icelandic Eurovision pre-selection, in 2003. They wound up in second place with the song *Eurovísa* and have always maintained they would try for Eurovision again.

In 2011 the Icelandic national newspaper *Frettabladid* nominated Pollapönk for the Fellowship Award in the category "Fighting against prejudice". That same year Pollapönk received the Icelandic Ibbý Award (International Board of Books for Young People) for their contribution to children's culture.

<https://www.facebook.com/pollaponk>

Iceland in Eurovision

Appearances: 27
Debut: 1986
Victory: -
Best: 2nd
- 1999: All Out of Luck by Selma, with 146 points
- 2009: Is It True? by Yohanna, with 218 points
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2004, 2008-2013

Recent History

2013: Eg A Líf, by Eythor Ingi, 17th with 47 points
2012: Never Forget, by Greta Salóme & Jónsi, 20th with 46 points
2011: Coming Home, by Sjonnis Friends, 20th with 61 points

2014 National Final

On 3 September 2013, RÚV opened the submission period for interested songwriters to submit their entries until the deadline on 14 October 2013. At the close of the submission deadline, 297 entries were received. Two semi-finals took place on 1 and 8 February 2014 at RÚV Studios and the final took place on 15 February 2014 in Háskólabíó. A total of 10 songs were selected, and at the end, two superfinalists emerged, with Pollapönk winning against Sigríður Eyrún Friðriksdóttir.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

It's The Wiggles... with scottish comedian Frankie Boyle on backing vocals and their local MP lending a hand. If we were voting on sound alone, Iceland might have a shot. But visuals are important as well, and the colourful explosion will not serve them well. Maybe if they had went with black suits, white shirts, and coloured ties they'd have a chance of qualifying... but then UK improv troop ' The Noise Next Door' might send the lawyers round.

Samantha says...

Ah, Iceland. Land of volcanoes, vikings, telephone books ordered by first name...and punk for kids? Reykjavik's answer to the Wiggles are Pollapönk, who make music geared towards children that their parents can still appreciate (at least in theory). One of the few rock-oriented entries in this year's Contest, "No Prejudice" stands out. It's bright, bouncy, catchy, and with a universal message that we can all appreciate, but will viewers vote for this, or will they just consider it child's play?

Sharleen says...

The Icelandic Wiggles have graduated from kiddies entertainers to the big people song contest, bringing along a bundle of energy and joy with their anti-discrimination anthem. Its a fun song along the likes of Presidents of the United States, and should appeal to the Western side both with their pop sensibilities and message. However the fear for this is to be labelled a novelty by broadcasters may affect some televoting, as well as juries struggling to put their name to it for points in the East. Therefore this is a borderline qualifier, which if it is lucky enough to make the Saturday is likely to see the bottom of the table on the big night.

Your Notes

Ireland



At a Glance

Song: Heartbeat
Artist: Can-Linn (featuring Kasey Smith)
Composer: Hazel Kaneswaran, Jonas Gladnikoff, Rasmus Palmgren, Patrizia Helander
Lyricist: Jonas Gladnikoff, Rasmus Palmgren, Patrizia Helander
Performing: Semi 2, 9th

About the Artist

Kasey Smith is 23 years old and hails from the northside of Dublin. She is from a known family of singers going back to her grandfather who was a showband singer. She rose to fame with the BT Music Award nominated girlband Wonderland in 2010 under the tutelage of Louis Walsh and Westlife's Kian Egan. After Wonderland, Kasey travelled to Nashville, Tennessee where she focused on her solo career, writing songs and getting as much on-stage experience as possible in the city's vibrant music scene.

www.facebook.com/KaseyLeeannSmith

Ireland in Eurovision

Appearances: 48
Debut: 1965
Victory: 7
- 1970: All Kinds of Everything by Dana, with 32 points
- 1980: Whats Another Year? by Johnny Logan, with 143 points
- 1987: Hold Me Now by Johnny Logan, with 172 points
- 1992: Why Me? by Linda Martin, with 155 points
- 1993: In Your Eyes by Niamh Kavanagh, with 187 points
- 1994: Rock n Roll Kids by Paul Harrington and Charlie McGettigan, with 226 points
- 1996: The Voice by Eimear Quinn, with 162 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2004, 2006, 2010-2013

Recent History

2013: Only Love Survives by Ryan Dolan, 26th with 5 points
2012: Waterline, by Jedward, 19th with 46 points
2011: Lipstick, by Jedward, 8th with 119 points

2014 National Final

On 31 October 2013, RTÉ announced that the Eurosong selection procedure would return, continuing as a special edition of The Late Late Show to be held on 28 February 2014 and hosted by Ryan Tubridy. RTÉ revealed the names and titles of the competing artists and songs on 5 February 2014. The five songs were presented on 6 February 2014 on RTÉ 2fm. After a controversial show featuring a number of allegations relating to favouritism of the hosts to certain artists, Heartbeat won with 114 points, 12 over the 2nd placed Eoghan Quigg.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Ireland once more turn to the same formula that handed them seven victories, and countless top ten placings. Irish folk instrumentation, a basic pop song structure, mix everything together, and leave it for three minutes.

Two things to note. It didn't work last year, why should it work this year? And have we all forgotten that the Irish glory years were back when you had to sing in your national language (so they had the advantage of singing in English), when everything was decided by jury, and there was no input from the public in the voting? If you look at the Irish performance from 1998/1999 going forward, the truth is clear. Eurovision might like Balkan Ballads and Greek Dance, but the traditional Irish sound is not appealing enough.

Samantha says...

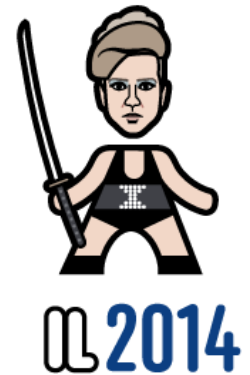
Well, if there's any song this year with a real "sense of place", it's Ireland's entry "Heartbeat". With fiddles and bodhrán blended into a classic pop arrangement, what you hear is exactly what you get. However, a similar formula was used last year, and Ryan Dolan came in last place in the Final. While the song is perfectly enjoyable, it's all just a little bit of history repeating.

Sharleen says...

Other than the exciting blip that Jedward gave the country a couple of years ago, Ireland seems to be stuck in a rut with their Eurovision entries. They consistently select unexciting, middle of road pop songs with a light Irish lilt to them. May have worked well in the 1990s, but as the rest of Western Europe has caught onto the fact the contest has moved on, they clearly haven't worked it out. No matter what is professed, this song has no heart whatsoever. I foresee a similar result looming as 2013 - struggle to qualify, going nowhere fast at the final.

Your Notes

Israel



At a Glance

Song: Same Heart
Artist: Mei Finegold
Composer: Rami Talmid
Lyricist: Rami Talmid
Performing: Semi 2, 2nd

About the Artist

From a young age, Mei dreamed of becoming an artist. She struggled on her rise to the top, from local singing choirs to low budget musical productions and taking lessons. Eventually, from the age of 18 to 26, she became a successful underground rock singer, performing all over the country.

In 2009, when Mei was 26 years old, she entered the 7th season of the successful TV talent show *A Star Is Born*. Right from start, Mei's Avant-garde vocal abilities and extremely wild performances were the talk of the show. Eventually, she reached the season finale, came in 3rd place and became the most talked about person on the Israeli scene.

In 2010, her dream came true: Mei was offered a part in a huge musical production at the Cameri Theatre. Mei was praised by the critics and audiences for her performance and won the respected "Best New Actress 2010" award for her role.

In 2012, Mei was cast once again in a musical production at the Cameri theatre. This time it was *Kazablan*, a classic Israeli musical. Mei plays a character called Roza, a larger than life local bar owner which the critics and audiences fall in love with. In May 2013 at the annual Israeli Theatre Awards, Mei was nominated for and won the prestigious award "Best Supporting Actress Of The Year" for her role as Roza.

<https://www.facebook.com/mei.eurovision>

Israel in Eurovision

Appearances: 37
Debut: 1973
Victory: 3
- 1978: A-Ba-Ni-Bi by Izhar Cohen and Alphabeta, with 157 points
- 1979: Hallelujah by Milk and Honey, with 125 points
- 1998: Diva by Dana International, with 172 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2005, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2010

Recent History

2013: Rak Bishvilo, by Moran Mazor, 14th in the semi with 40 points

2012: Time, by Izabo, 13th in the semi with 33 points

2011: Ding Dong, by Dana International, 15th in the semi with 35 points

2014 National Final

On 11 January 2014, IBA announced that Mei Feingold was selected as the Israeli representative for the Eurovision Song Contest 2014. The song that Mei Finegold will represent Israel with in Copenhagen was selected through a three song national final called *Kdam Eurovision 2014*. The winning song "Same Heart" was selected solely by the SMS votes from the public and was revealed during a special televised broadcast on 5 March 2014.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

An interesting mix of internal selection (the artist) and public voting (for the song). Feingold is already a media name thanks to her run on the TV talent Show circuit, but it must still be a little bit upsetting to have your own composed song gather just 5% of the public vote. Still, 'Same Heart' has a lot of promise, especially if the staging reflects the Game of Thrones/Girls on Film ethos of the official video.

It's a tough balance to get the female rocker genre come over well through TV. Israeli TV managed it and propelled Feingold to stardom, but can DR capture the same energy? I hope so, otherwise Sharleen's prediction of 'hot mess' (she did mention that, yes?) is sadly going to come true.

Samantha says...

A bit of Beyoncé and a bit of Benatar, Mei Finegold is this year's angry, husky-voiced dance-rock diva.

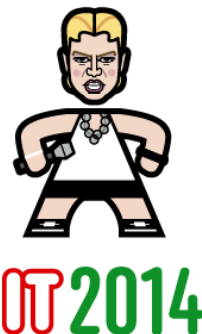
Full of emotion without getting maudlin, you can't take your eyes or ears off of Mei. She's not your little 16-year-old pop princess; she's been around, and has stories from the road to tell. I can't quite decide whether this song makes me want to dance or stick pins into a voodoo doll of an ex-boyfriend, but I love it either way. Excuse me while I go and learn enough Hebrew to lip-synch this properly.

Sharleen says...

The gravel-voiced Mei has given us a great dance song from the studio which I have yet to see performed live. This always has me doubting - can it be pulled off live? We have all seen it before; from the likes of Poland and 'Jestem' in 2011, and even Hungary's Kati Wolf struggled vocally to dance and sing all at once. That's exactly what I think we will see from Israel in 2014 too. My gut says that this will be a red hot mess of dancers, off-key vocals and an awkward dance break in the middle to kill its chances of qualifying.

Your Notes

Italy



At a Glance

Song: La Mia Citta
Artist: Emma
Composer: Emma Marrone
Lyricist: Emma Marrone
Performing: (finalist, position tba)

About the Artist

In 2010, Emma attended and passed the first selection of the auditions of the most famous Italian talent show *Amici*. EMMA then won the *Amici* 2010 edition, and released her first album entitled *Oltre*. The album reached #1 in the album charts and on iTunes and immediately established another record entering directly at # 1 in the sales charts of the year. In February, she attended together with the Italian band Modà, the Sanremo Festival 2011 edition with the song *Arriverà* which became a major hit. The track was included in the *A me piace così* Sanremo Edition and reached the platinum status at the end of the same month. On May 29th, 2011 she was asked to open the 2010-2011 Italian Cup final at the Stadio Olimpico in Rome singing the Italian national anthem. Beside the intense recording studio activity she embarked on a new tour. Before her tour started EMMA opened for 3 Gianna Nannini and two Vasco Rossi gigs at San Siro Stadium. The same year she has been awarded at the Wind Music Awards 2011 for the *A me piace così* double platinum and for the multiplatinum digital sales of *Arriverà* with Modà.

Italy in Eurovision

Appearances: 40
Debut: 1956
Victory: 2
- 1964: Non ho l'età by Gigliola Cinquetti, with 49 points
- 1990: Insieme: 1992 by Toto Cutugno, with 149 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Auto-qualify (Big 5)

Recent History

2013: L'Essenziale, by Marco Mengoni, 7th with 126 points
2012: L'Amore È Femmina (Out Of Love), by Nina Zilli, 9th with 101 points
2011: Madness of Love, by Raphael Gualazzi, 2nd with 189 points

2014 National Final

On 22 January 2014, RAI announced that Emma Marrone had been selected as the Italian representative for the Eurovision Song Contest 2014. This year RAI opted to forego selecting an artist from the list of participants at the Sanremo Music Festival, which had been the method of selection since 2011. On 24 January 2014, RAI revealed that the song Emma will sing at the contest in Denmark will be "La mia città" (My city).

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Oh Emma, oh Emma, oh Emma. Not that I don't love the San Remo 2012 winner, but having kept an ear on the career for so long the excitement I felt when her name was announced was palpable. And then they revealed the song was the filler track that bulked up the re-release of 'Schiena'. There's nothing fundamentally wrong with 'La Mia Citta', it's just that Marrone could do far better, no... has done far better, than this straight ahead rock number.

This is a missed opportunity. A glorious chance at a Top Ten, but a missed opportunity. I assume RAI is not quite ready yet.

Samantha says...

Emma is arguably the biggest star in this year's contest, with four platinum albums to her name in her native Italy. She has the swagger and star quality that a winning Eurovision performer needs (along with a quality song, of course), but there's a difference between how a singer performs at a live concert versus how they perform on television. Last year, I remember watching fellow Italian Marco Mengoni, himself a well-established star, completely ignore the camera and, by extension, the audience at home. During Emma's performance in the German National Final, I saw those same patterns. It's wonderful to connect to the in-house crowd, but they are only a tiny, tiny fraction of your potential supporters.

Sharleen says...

Italy surprises us once again by selecting a winning act in the form of Emma. La Mia Citta escapes her usual format and goes a little bit 1970s Blondie or 1990s Elastica, as she plays the growly rawk-grrl on stage. As the contest gets closer though, with each live performance I see the confidence and brashness I enjoy so much of Emma chipped away, and the song suffers for it. Rather than the hope of delivering a punk-pop attitude that the song deserves, it comes off more like Mickey Mouse rock to match her video clip ears. If this form continues, mid-table result at the final at best.

Your Notes

Latvia



At a Glance

Song: Cake to Bake
Artist: Aarzemnieki
Composer: Guntis Veilands
Lyricist: Guntis Veilands
Performing: Semi 1, 2nd

About the Artist

The Aarzemnieki (or Foreigners) phenomenon began as an unexpected shock for one German's special interest and creative approach to the Euro introduction in Latvia. In the summer of 2013, Joran Steinhauer, whilst in his home in Bochum, Germany wrote a farewell song to the Lat currency, aptly naming the song *Paldies Latijam!* (Thank You, Lat).

This isn't the first time Joran has stepped on the Eurovision stage, having performed in the national Latvian selection in 2008 with his former group Axlina performing the song More Than 27.

Latvia in Eurovision

Appearances: 15
Debut: 2000
Victory: 1
- 2002: I Wanna by Marie N, with 176 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2005-2008

Recent History

2013: Here We Go, by PeR, 17th in the semi with 13 points
2012: Beautiful Song, by Anmary, 16th in the semi with 17 points
2011: Angel in Disguise, by Musiqq, 17th in the semi with 25 points,

2014 National Final

Dziesma 2014 was the second edition of the Latvian national final that selected Latvia's entry for the Eurovision Song Contest 2014. The competition consisted of two semi-finals on 1 and 2 February 2014 and a final on 22 February 2014. On 1 October 2013, LTV opened the submission deadline for interested artists and composers to submit their entries until the deadline on 20 November 2013. LTV adopted the slogan "*Made in Latvia*" for the competition and only accepted entry submissions from Latvian residents, abolishing a previous rule that allowed for foreign submissions. The 24 semi-finalists selected from the received submissions were revealed during a press conference on 2 December 2013. The top 3 selected – Dons, Samanta Tina and Aarzemnieki were announced at the final, and whilst Dons won the jury, Cake to Bake shockingly won the televote and internet vote to take 1st place.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Sometimes the good guys win. When I first heard Cake to Bake i could sing along to it. On the third listen I hoped it would make it to the televised round at the very least. And as I continued to listen, I dreamed. I dreamed that a simple song (with a rather complicated chord progression it has to be said) could actually have an impact and do something.

I don't think there's going to be a happier surprise this Eurovision season than sitting front row at the Latvian national Final as Cake to bake actually went and bloody won the ticket to Copenhagen. Because this could never qualify... could it?

Samantha says...

Normally, Eurovision presents viewers with highly-polished entries, full of special effects and sparkle. This is not one of those songs. "Cake to Bake" is the kind of comfortable, cozy tune you'd hear around a campfire, where one of your friends brings a guitar, another brings a bag of marshmallows to roast, and everyone simply basks in the joy of each other's company. This might not be the kind of song to get your heart racing, but it's the kind to give you a sense of the "warm fuzzies". I dare you not to smile.

Sharleen says...

I want to love Latvia. Its a country that I feel a closest affinity to in the contest because of what they achieved at Eurovision as a country in their earliest entries. But once again, I feel Latvia has lost its understanding of what it should send to the contest. When this was chosen from its national final, my heart broke again for the 6th time in a row. I understand its twee-cutesy-kitsch lyrical appeal with fans.

But I am left cold from the novelty, and I struggle to see who could vote for this to qualify to the final. Its a likely bottom spot at its semi final. And I hate that it could lead to the country deciding not to be at the contest in 2015.

Your Notes

Lithuania



At a Glance

Song: Attention
Artist: Vilija Matačiūnaitė
Composer: Vilija Matačiūnaitė , Viktoras Vaupšas
Lyricist: Vilija Matačiūnaitė
Performing: Semi 2, 7th

About the Artist

Vilija Matačiūnaitė was born in early summer of 1986. However, her professional singer career started just in 2004, when she turned 18 and decided to compete in an international singing competition "Amber star" in Latvia, where she won 2nd place. A year later, in 2005 she decided to participate in one of the most successful Lithuanian TV reality-singing competition "The Way To The Stars". Again, she was among the leaders and took 2nd place. Along with that, she participated in two TV reality-singing competitions: "National League of Music" and "National League of Music – Christmas Cup". In both of them she won 1st place. In year 2007 she won 1st place in a TV reality-singing competition "National League of Music – St. John's battle" and was in the TOP 10 of most radio played singers of that year. In 2011 Vilija once again took part in another competition held in Moldova – "Golden Voices", where she won the 2nd place. In the same year she graduated Jazz vocal studies at Vilnius College. A year later, while she was living in UK, Vilija won 1st place in country singer competition "Melange Factor". Eventually she got back in Lithuania and in 2013 participated in Lithuanian's established singer's competition "Golden Voice", where she took 1st place.

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Vilija-Mata%C4%8Di%C5%ABnait%C4%97/187599971260958>

Lithuania in Eurovision

Appearances: 15
Debut: 1994
Victory: -
Best: 6th
-2006: We Are the Winners by LT United, with 162 points
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2006, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2013

Recent History

2013: Something, by Andrius Pojavis, 22nd with 17 points
2012: Love is Blind, by Donny Montell, 14th with 70 points
2011: C'est Ma Vie, by Evelina Sašenko, 19th with 63 points

2014 National Final

Eurovizijos dainų konkurso nacionalinė atranka was the national final format developed by LRT in order to select Lithuania's entry for the Eurovision Song Contest 2014. The competition involved an initial twenty artists competing in a twelve week long process that began on 14 December 2013 and concluded with a winning song selected on 22 February 2014 and a winning artist selected on 1 March 2014. Eventually down to 3 artists and one song, Vilija won both the jury and televote.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

When you start out on a nine week long National Final season, you don't expect it to take twelve weeks. With constantly shifting rules, more shows added because the viewing figures were so high, the final result is a bit.. err.. bland. There's a lot of shouting, a lot of repetition, and not a huge amount of charm on show during the live Lithuanian broadcasts. The Amsterdam preview ditched the little black dress for a more street-smart look which helped, but this is going to need a lot of help to get through the semi finals.

Samantha says...

The Lithuanian National Final was an absolute shambles, with artists being pigeonholed into performing songs that simply did not do them justice. It's ironic that this sounds so mismatched, considering that Vilija actually composed this entry. There's a sense of chaos and disjointedness in this song's arrangement that just keeps me from getting into it. And maybe I'm just being picky, but is anybody else bothered by the complete lack of rhyme scheme here?

Sharleen says...

Starting off so well in the national selection process this year, I had Lithuania down as ones to watch in 2014. Unfortunately they lost my 'attention' with their lack of care in selecting Vilija as their entrant.

Rather than singing, its delivered in a mix of speaking and shouting, which was where the acoustic version of it by Vaidas excelled and may have been a better choice. The song sounds modern, but perhaps its too smart with the constant flip of tempo and delivery to gather steam with the general viewership of Eurovision. A borderline qualifier, but too divisive in its sound and performance to go far at the final.

Your Notes

Malta



At a Glance

Song: Coming Home
Artist: Firelight
Composer: Richard Edwards Micallef
Lyricist: Richard Edwards Micallef
Performing: Semi 2, 1st

About the Artist

Richard is 31. Music is in his blood. His father is a well-known singer in Malta and just about all his family are entertainers. Richard plays the Appalachian mountain dulcimer, acoustic guitar, and percussion. He is joined in Firelight by his sister, Michelle Mifsud, on the piano, and brothers Wayne William, as backing vocalist, and Daniel Micallef on the acoustic guitar. Additional band members are Tony Polidano, on the upright bass, and Leslie Decesare on the drums and harmonica.

In 2005, Richard took a step away from home to venture in the UK music industry. While in the UK he got the chance to perform alongside Leona Lewis, Ray Quinn and other *X Factor* contestants. He got the thumbs up from the legendary Simon Cowell on the judge's panel and made it to the final 80. Later Richard joined a British rock band called Cast Away. His role in the band was playing the bass and vocals. He spent time touring many places across the south east of England.

Richard returned to Malta in 2009. He has co-produced a number of singles with his brother, Wayne William. His music made it to the local charts hitting the top spot for a number of weeks. Richard entered the Malta Eurovision Song Contest in 2003 and 2005 as part of the group The Mics. Since 2010, Richard took part as Richard Edwards and came as close as the runner up in 2011 with the song *Finally*.

<https://www.facebook.com/EurovisionSongMalta>

Malta in Eurovision

Appearances: 27
Debut: 1971
Victory: -
Best: 2nd
- 2002: 7th Wonder by Ira Losco, with 164 points
- 2005: Angel by Chiara, with 192 points
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2004, 2005, 2006, 2009, 2012, 2013

Recent History

2013: Tomorrow, by Gianluca, 8th with 120 points
2012: This is the Night, by Kurt Calleja, 21st with 41 points
2011: One Life, by Glen Vella, 11th in the semi with 54 points

2014 National Final

On 29 November 2013, the 20 semi-finalists were revealed during a special edition of the television show *Xarabank*. The semi-final took place on 7 February 2014 where twenty songs competed for fourteen qualifying spots in the final. The final took place on 8 February 2014 where the fourteen entries that qualified from the semi-final performed again and the votes of a five-member jury panel (5/6) and the results of public televoting (1/6) determined the winner. Coming 4th in the televote, and 1st in jury with a 20 point lead over Dee Bee, Firelight were selected the winners.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Be honest.

If there is one thing I look for in a Eurovision song, it is honesty. There have been countless manufactured bands, and artificial pairings of singers and songs not just at Eurovision but throughout pop history. Most of the time they fail, but sometimes they do take a win (the kit-bashing Bucks Fizz being a great example). But you can smell that something is not right a key-change away.

I don't get any of that from Firelight. The brother and sister combination works, the rest of the band seem like best of friends, and you can imagine them all round the same table in Olly Reed's bar on the Island, writing the song over some mead. And not just this song, their promo CD is actually a four track EP showcasing all their talents. It's a smart move.

I struggle to get over the gut feeling that Malta cannot win a modern ESC with their low diaspora and cultural voting partners... but I thought that going in to Junior Eurovision. At the end of the day, it's a Song Contest, and the best songs always do well. Top Ten should be achievable, and after that point it's up to the gods... or the DR running order...

Samantha says...

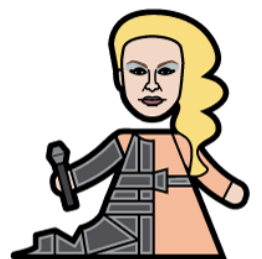
Toe-tapping and smile-inducing, "Coming Home" isn't very far removed from the nouveau-folk tracks you might hear on the radio today. You don't see a lot of Appalachian Mountain Dulcimer around these days, so I give the Maltese credit for stepping away from the sunny pop songs and Disneyfied ballads that have been their bread and butter in past years. Richard Edwards has been trying to make it to Eurovision for years now, and I'm not only thrilled to see him make the jump to the international stage, but I'm relieved to see him evade the curse of the constant-tryers: ending up at Eurovision with the weakest song he had sent to the NF (coughcoughSanna). I loved "Finally", "Fall Like Rome", and "Look at Me Now", but with the support of his family around him, his vocals and his composition soars. This is absolutely a personal favorite of mine.

Sharleen says...

Richie Edwards has produced a song which references that common radio sound of Mumford & Sons, a lovely little piece of jangly folk-spiked guitar pop that is a perfect way to start the second semi final. The ability to have everyone tapping their feet and clapping in their hands is no doubt what Malta wishes to capitalise on after the 'nice' entry we got and did well last year. It's certainly riding a wave; the video linking to the hundred year anniversary of World War I, the radio-friendly sound, the ability to produce a song no-one I have spoken to has yet to say they actually dislike or hate. If they are lucky enough with a good final position I think they could ride that wave all the way back to Malta and finally be 'coming home' with a win.

Your Notes

Moldova



MD2014

At a Glance

Song: Wild Soul
Artist: Cristina Scarlat
Composer: Ivan Akulov
Lyricist: Lidia Scarlat
Performing: Semi 1, 11th

About the Artist

Cristina was born on March 3rd, 1981 into a family with traditional music roots. From an early age, music was Cristina's constant companion. She plays piano and violin. Cristina's first education was as a chorister and a conductor. But her vocal abilities motivated her to continue her studies as a vocalist. In 2006, Cristina graduated from the Moldovan music conservatory. Throughout her career as a singer, Cristina gained a great experience by competing and winning prizes in a wide range of festivals and contests, including the International Festival of Arts Slavianski Bazaar in Belarus. Being one of the most powerful voices of Moldova, Cristina is also a lead singer of the Presidential Orchestra.

<https://www.facebook.com/cristinascarlatmusic>

Moldova in Eurovision

Appearances: 10
Debut: 2005
Victory: -
Best: 6th
- 2005: Boonika Bate Doba by Zdob si Zdub, with 148 points
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009-2013

Recent History

2013: O Mie, by Aliona Moon, 11th with 71 points
2012: Lautar, by Pasha Parfeny, 11th with 81 points
2011: So Lucky, by Zdob si Zdub, 12th with 97 points

2014 National Final

O Melodie Pentru Europa 2014 was the national final format developed by TRM in order to select Moldova's entry for the Eurovision Song Contest 2014. Twenty-four entries qualified from the auditions to compete in two semi-finals on 11 and 13 March 2014, where sixteen qualified to compete in the final on 15 March 2014. Coming 1st in the jury vote and 2nd in the televote, Cristina won over Boris Cavali.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Many moons ago, Williams created one of the finest pinball machines out there... The Machine Bride of Pin-Bot. The game plot has an android that you slowly turn into a human being through the use of your silvered balls. At the half-way mark, the Bride is half woman, half machine, even though there are countless enemies around her trying to change her back.

I still can't quite believe that Moldova have sent a homage to a Pinball machine as their entry to the Eurovision Song Contest.

Well, can you come up with a better explanation?

Samantha says...

From a drumming granny to unicycle-riding fairy princesses to the Epic Sax Guy, Moldova has cornered the market on taking a straightforward song and elevating it to nearly surreal heights. As I listen to "Wild Soul", all I can see in my mind's eye is Cristina Scarlat as a Moldovan Maleficent: powerful, dramatic, and more than a wee bit sinister. This could be fun...cue the dry ice!

Sharleen says...

Over the top, over produced, over performed - could this be under-estimated? If you want to compare this to some of the other female led ballads of the semi, I would rank this above the likes of Sweden in terms of impact and memorability. Cristina should no doubt see quite a few points coming from the likes of her Eastern neighbours and I could imagine a few points from the likes of Spain to be awarded too.

The juries should rightly lap this up as her voice is powerhouse. When it comes to the final, I'm expecting a mid-table result.

Your Notes

Montenegro



ME2014

At a Glance

Song: Moj Svijet
Artist: Sergej Ćetković
Composer: Sergej Ćetković
Lyricist: Sergej Ćetković, Emina Sandal
Performing: Semi 1, 15th

About the Artist

Sergej's first appearance, which occurred 28 years ago, can be taken, tentatively, as the official beginning of an impressive musical career. In 1986 when he won the second place at the child festival "Our joy" in his native Podgorica, Sergej was only ten years old. Sergej was definitely "infected" with pop-rock sound, therefore three years later in 1989 his official musical career started with the band "Burning Heart" in which he played keyboard and sang back vocals. Five years later, in 1994, he sang in a full capacity in the band "Amphitheatre", where he began as a keyboardist and back vocal and he later became the lead vocal.

Four years later, in 1998, Sergej begins his solo career by appearing at the summer pop festival "Sunny Skale" in Herceg Novi, where he sang the song *You Were A Rose*. With his performances in 2003 at the Mediterranean Festival in Budva where he sang *I Exist As Well*, which is still the ultimate hit, and a year later at the festival "Eurovision – Euro song Monte Negro" where he sang *I Can Not Forgive You* he confirmed the position of his musical direction.

<https://www.facebook.com/tv.crnagora?fref=ts>

Montenegro in Eurovision

Appearances: 6
Debut: 2007
Victory: - Best: 11th in the semi
- 2009: Just Get Out of my Life, by Andrea Demirovic, with 44 points
Semi Finals: -

Recent History

2013: Igranka, by Who See, 12th in the semi with 41 points
2012: Euro Neuro, by Rambo Amadeus, 15th in the semi with 20 points
2011: -

2014 National Final

On 19 November 2013, RTCG held a press conference where they presented Sergej Ćetković as the internally selected representative for Montenegro. The presentation of the entry took place on 9 March 2014 at the Hotel Splendid in Bečići, hosted by Sabrija Vulić.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

I love this! I grew up on Eurovision when the national language rule was in place, so Song Contest songs are meant to be in beautiful tones with words I have no clue. If you can tell a story using your tone of voice and emotion without having to resort to an understandable language, you have a wonderful song and a great performer.

Montenegro has all of that, they are in 'last ballad' slot, and if they can't qualify with all that in their favour, I don't know what else they could do, short of drafting Zeljko.

Samantha says...

Ah, the Big Balkan Ballad. Always sweepingly dramatic, always passionate, always powerful, and almost always appreciated on the scoreboard (especially when sung by men). Two hurdles face this one, however: Montenegro has never qualified for a Eurovision final, and all of the other former Yugoslav nations have either withdrawn from the contest or are in the other semifinal. But Sergej is an experienced performer with the vocal chops to make magic happen. Musically, while I love how this song builds and swells, and its potential for staging could be stunning, the abrupt ending of "Moj svijet" jars me more than a little. I want more, and the building blocks are there for an incredible climax, but it just leaves me feeling like Wile. E. Coyote hovering in the air for a moment before he realizes that yes, the cliff really ended ten feet ago. Boom.

Sharleen says...

Do we all miss the Balkans as much as I do? I am so happy Montenegro gives us something worth voting for both in televoting and jury-alike, as Sergej delivers a beautiful Balkan ballad that immediately transports me to that region. A song like this should ordinarily Hoover up a load of votes, but without those neighbours around in 2014, I worry that it may struggle when it really deserves to succeed on song quality alone. And falling in a slow burning section of its semi, it feels like its more borderline than it should be. I will err on the positive side though and call it for Montenegro finally to be there on Saturday.

Your Notes

Norway



NO 2014

At a Glance

Song: Silent Storm
Artist: Carl Espen
Composer: Josefin Winther
Lyricist: Josefin Winther
Performing: Semi 2, 3rd

About the Artist

Carl Espen Thorbjørnsen was born in Bergen, Norway, in 1982. Among his cousins, aunts and uncles, you can find the woman behind the song *Silent Storm*, Carl's cousin Josefin Winther, a London based artist and songwriter born in Bergen in 1986. Four years younger than her cousin, Josefin has no problem recalling a day in her life being 12 years. Carl Espen had entered a local music competition on Osterøy, and Josefin was standing with her aunt in the audience. Carl performed *Wild World* by Cat Stevens, and ended up winning the whole competition. Josefin was so proud. Since then Josefin has pursued her own career in music, and established herself as a critically acclaimed artist and songwriter.

<https://www.facebook.com/carlespenofficial>

Norway in Eurovision

Appearances: 53
Debut: 1960
Victory: 3
- 1985: La Det Swinge by Bobbysocks, with 123 points
- 1995: Nocturne by Secret Garden, with 148 points
- 2009: Fairytale by Alexander Rybak, with 387 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2004, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2013

Recent History

2013: I Feed You My Love, by Margaret Berger, 4th with 191 points
2012: Stay, by Tooji, 26th with 7 points
2011: Haba Haba, by Stella Mwangi, 17th in the semi with 30 points

2014 National Final

On 6 May 2013, NRK confirmed Norway's participation in the Eurovision Song Contest 2014 and announced that the 2014 edition of Melodi Grand Prix would undergo format changes. The competition took place as a week long music festival with three semi-finals that took place on 7, 8 and 9 March 2014 and a final on 15 March 2014. Fifteen artists and songs participated; five competed in each semi-final and three advanced from each semi-final to the final. The winning artist and song was determined in two rounds of SMS voting - first to select the top four, and then to select the winner. Carl Espen won with more than 14,000 televotes over the 2nd placed Linnea Dale.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Back in 1956, very few people watched Eurovision on the TV. It was primarily a radio broadcast (and staged as such). If, by some miracle, public televoting had been in place, everyone would have judged the songs purely on how they sounded and how well the voice connected.

If Carl Espen had been there in 1956, Lys Assia would be a footnote in history, as memorable as Freddy Quinn. Silent Storm is a song that is perfect for radio and iPhones, in that the emotion is in the words and the sound, not the visuals or the stage-craft. That's perhaps the weak link in Norway's bid for the 60th Contest. It's going to struggle to come across well on television.

That said, the show is for one night, the MP3 is forever.

Samantha says...

There's something so appealing about a guy who looks like he could take down trees with his bare hands singing about his vulnerabilities and emotions. This simple, heartfelt ballad just strikes me as so unpretentious and genuine, but will voters respond to something as understated as "Silent Storm"? Just as I said for the Netherlands, there is a place for subtlety and simplicity at Eurovision, and with a story and voice as unique as Carl's, this could be one to look out for.

Sharleen says...

Looking like he just stepped out of the local bikie gang quarters, Carl Espen breaks down all pre-conceptions with a beautiful brooding ballad that immediately makes me align it with the Gary Jules rendition of 'Mad World'. It has the same surprising and haunting quality and delivery, which sends shivers down my spine. Beautiful to listen to with your eyes closed, but seemingly loses all appeal when you then watch the same performer deliver it with his eyes closed. The connection and raw emotion is lost on stage, and if Carl cannot connect on stage with the audience, I think it will lose the voter appeal to take it higher than a mid-table finish at the final.

Your Notes

Poland



At a Glance

Song: My Slowianie - We Are Slavic
Artist: Donatan & Cleo
Composer: Donatan
Lyricist: Cleo
Performing: Semi 2, 5th

About the Artist

Donatan is famous in Poland as a music producer. He created music for more than 50 albums. Many of them received gold and platinum status. In 2012, Donatan launched his authorial album "Equinox" (Równonoc). This album is a compilation of the traditional Slavic sounds with some rap elements.

"Equinox" reached, already at pre-sale, the gold status and after few months got granted the diamond sale status. Donatan received many prestigious music awards.

In 2013 Donatan began to work with Cleo. Their single debut *We Are Slavs (My Słowianie)*, produced by Donatan, became a smash hit. Their video clip has become popular on youtube where it has been viewed more than 40 million times. Last year, the single *My Słowianie* also reached top ten in charts. This song has been chosen as the Polish entry in the 2014 Eurovision Song Contest.

Poland in Eurovision

Appearances: 17
Debut: 1994
Victory: -
Best: 2nd
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2008.

Recent History

2013: -

2012: -

2011: Jestem, by Magdalena Tul, 19th in the semi with 18 points

2014 National Final

On 25 February 2014, it was announced that Donatan and Cleo would represent Poland with their song "My Słowianie" during the TVP programme *Świat się kręci*.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

It's a welcome back to Poland, who have invariably sent challenging songs down the years. When they don't, they send Jestem, and tart up Magdalena Tul in a futuristic wenching costume. Well it's back to basics this year, in both the wenching and the challenge.

Send a hit song to Eurovision is a simple formula. The last big track to get the nod to ESC is (I think) Mandinga's Zaleilah, which had stormed the awards circuit and the charts. Poland's biggest hit over the last year is a parody of the perceptions of the Polish female. With a ridiculously over the top video that puts Benny Hill to shame, a driving rhythm and beat, Slavic Girls is rather memorable. Tacky. But memorable. And if all you need to do is qualify, that might be enough to make it to Saturday night.

Samantha says...

If you're watching at home with your family, this is likely the song that will incite the deepest generational rift between your kids and your Grandma. (Unless your Nan's a fan of twerking, in which case, my thoughts are with you.) Love it or hate it, this earworm of a song (it went viral in Poland months before it was even considered for Eurovision) will stick with you for the rest of the night. It's cheeky, confident, and innovative, but my mind keeps flitting back to last year's similarly-structured "Igranka": loved by fans, but panned by juries. It's fantastic to see Poland back in the fray, especially with something as potentially unforgettable as this.

Sharleen says...

From one crazy mess (Georgia performing prior) to another, this song has captured a lot of attention from central Europe even before being selected for the contest. I doubt the reason it has done so well is purely down to the song quality itself, but the rather interesting close up display of sweat beading on a particular part of the female anatomy. But that prior recognition by the audience and a large disapora voting should at least allow the entry to proceed to Saturday night with ease. Beyond that, I'm not predicting great things.

Your Notes

Portugal



PT2014

At a Glance

Song: Quero Ser Tua
Artist: Suzy
Composer: Emanuel
Lyricist: Emanuel
Performing: Semi 1, 13th

About the Artist

Suzy was born in Figueira da Foz and has been active in showbiz since she was a kid as a member of the Children's band "Onda Choc" which had huge success. In late 1999, she released the song *Nesta Noite Branca*, a hit that is still played on the radio and shown on TV today. This year she was invited by producer Emanuel to perform his song at the 2014 Portuguese national selection, *Festival da Canção*.

<https://www.facebook.com/suzy.aeurovisao>

Portugal in Eurovision

Appearances: 47
Debut: 1964
Victory: -
Best: 6th
Semi Finals: Qualified 2008-2010

Recent History

2013: -

2012: Vida Minha, by Filipa Sousa, 13th with 39 points

2011: Luta E Alegria, by Homens da Luta, 18th in the semi with 22 points

2014 National Final

Festival da Canção 2014 was the 48th edition of the Portuguese national final Festival da Canção, which selected Portugal's entry for the Eurovision Song Contest 2014. The format of the competition included one semi-final on 8 March 2014 and a final on 15 March 2014, both taking place at the Convento do Beato in Lisbon. The semi-final featured ten competing songs, the top five songs from the semi-final qualified to the final. Suzy won convincingly in the televote with more than 41%.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

While it's great to see one of the greatest 'it's the taking part that counts' back in the Contest after a clamour from the public and the musical press, could they not have found something a bit more... worthy?

Quero Ser Tua is energetic, and you can tell that Suzy is giving it her all. But the material is rather weak, feels dated, and while there are flashes of inspiration (mostly in the ethnic rhythms) the song never catches fire. There's lots of kindling on offer, lots of sparkle, but without anything more substantial Portugal is not going anywhere.

Samantha says...

After skipping 2013, we welcome Portugal back into the fray for the 50th anniversary of their first participation. While I credit them for giving us a song with some regional flair (as well as a danceable beat), "Quero ser tua" feels like a glass of vinho verde when I'd rather have port. It's light, refreshing, and easy to consume, but I'm missing the depth and complexity that I know Portugal can give us. During the National Final, I was more transfixed by the leather pants of her backing dancers than I was with her, to be quite honest. I want to root for the underdog, but I just don't get much satisfaction from this.

Sharleen says...

At a moment in the first semi final, Suzy delivers a little bit of energy at a time when the lineup has sucked the audience dry of emotion and caring. Her little 'Lambada-lite' tune could gather some momentum from its positioning, although vocally the arrangement seemed somewhat messy at national final stage and would have to improve substantially at Eurovision to absolutely guarantee qualification. Very borderline indeed.

Your Notes

Romania



At a Glance

Song: Miracle
Artist: Paula Seling & Ovi
Composer: Ovi, Philip Halloun, Frida Amundsen, Beyond51
Lyricist: Ovi, Philip Halloun, Frida Amundsen, Beyond51
Performing: Semi 2, 15th

About the Artist

Paula Seling is a Romanian singer, songwriter, musician, record producer, performer, TV personality and entertainer. Born on a Christmas Day, she started to play piano at the age of six and won few awards as a classical piano player. When she was ten years old she had her first solo vocal performance in the school choir. Since then she won almost all the trophies in the Romanian music festivals.

OVI is a multitasking singer, songwriter, producer and musician who feels most at home when he's performing. Ovi's career highlights include various collaborations with international artists, songwriters and producers like: Simone, En Vogue, Preston Glass, Simen Eriksrud, Morten Stjernholm, Philip Halloun, Beyond51, Mike Raw, Espen Berg, D'sound, Thomas Shulz, Adam Powers and Paula Seling, among others, and also lots of music awards received for singing and composing.

<https://www.facebook.com/eurovision.romania>

Romania in Eurovision

Appearances: 16
Debut: 1994
Victory: -
Best: 3rd
- 2005: Let Me Try by Luminița Anghel & Sistem, with 158 points
- 2010: Playing with Fire by Paula Seling & Ovi, with 162 points
Semi Finals: Qualified 2004-2013

Recent History

2013: It's My Life, by Cezar, 13th with 65 points
2012: Zahleilah, by Mandinga, 12th with 71 points
2011: Change, by Hotel FM, 17th with 77 points

2014 National Final

The national final took place at the Sică Alexandrescu Drama Theatre in Braşov on 1 March 2014. 12 entries competed, Coming 2nd in the televote, and leading the jury vote with 21 points, Paula and Ovi took out the title as expected.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

One of the core rules of Eurovision is simple: "you don't go back again." Paula Seling & Ovi's reputation will precede them at every turn. They should romp home, easy qualifier, guaranteed top ten. Well, many have had those sentiments going in to the finals, and have been proven wrong. There must be doubt in their minds.

I even wonder if their funky hologram-esque technology will be allowed on stage. With Miracle the weaker song carrying safer and pedestrian views (love is nice, as opposed to love is hate from 2010), the third place from 2010 will hang around their necks like the pedestrian millstone that their 2014 entry actually is.

Samantha says...

There's always a risk when former Eurovision stars come back into the fray, especially when the pressure to pass their previous record looms. That's the challenge that 2010 bronze-medalists Paula and Ovi face in Copenhagen. Is "Miracle" as memorable as "Playing With Fire" was? Iffy, but will viewers and potential voters this year remember that? At the very least, Ovi's comfortable on stage, Paula's vocal range is impressive, the pair know how to put on a show, and Romania's itching for their first win. If nothing else, you can expect an entertaining three minutes with "Miracle".

Sharleen says...

The song is a throwaway dance number, like countless hundreds I hear pumped on commercial radio every day. But the difference with this one is that I know from my history that Paula and Ovi have the vocal abilities to pull it off LIVE at Eurovision. Rubbish tune, nothing much, but I have seen songs with less appeal sell millions. I have even seen such song (imo) win at Eurovision. And you just know Romania will throw everything and kitchen sink at the stage show, its promotion. My head says one thing, my heart says another. I can't write this entry off in any way – for Top Ten, hell, even to win the whole goddamn thing.

Your Notes

Russia



At a Glance

Song: Shine
Artist: Tolmachevy Sisters
Composer: Philipp Kirkorov, Dimitris Kontopoulos
Lyricist: John Ballard, Ralph Charlie, Gerard James
Borg
Performing: Semi 1, 7th

About the Artist

Eurovision fans remember the Tolmachevy Twins from 2006 when the girls, at the age of nine, won the Junior Eurovision Song Contest in Bucharest, Romania. With their song *Vesennij Jazz* (The Spring Jazz), they reached 154 points.

In 2007, Russia 1 Channel broadcast the documentary film about their success in the 2006 Junior Eurovision Song Contest *The Phenomenal Twin Sisters*. In the same year, Anastasia and Maria starred in the New Year's Eve television musical *Kingdom Of Crooked Mirrors* where they sang together with Alla Pugacheva, the Russian participant of the 1997 Eurovision Song Contest. The sisters also released their album *Polovinki* (The Halves).

Later they took part in various concerts, for example at the Red Square, in different music television shows like *Saturday Night* at the Russia-1 Channel.

Russia in Eurovision

Appearances: 18
Debut: 1994
Victory: 1
- 2008: Believe by Dima Bilan, with 272 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified 2004-2013

Recent History

2013: What If, by Dina Garipova, 5th with 174 points

2012: Party for Everybody, by Buranovskiye Babushki, 2nd with 259 points

2011: Get You, by Alexej Vorobyov, 16th with 77 points

2014 National Final

On 15 March 2014, RTR announced that The Tolmachevy Sisters, who previously won the Junior Eurovision Song Contest 2006, were selected to represent Russia – a choice made internally by an expert jury. The Russian entry, "Shine", was premiered on 19 March 2014.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Fair play to the Tolmachevy Twins. To all intents, a last minute decision in a chaotic selection saw the girls recording the song within a day of the Heads of Delegation meeting where the song had to be submitted to. If you buy into the myth, they were back in Russia recording *as the meeting was going ahead*, presumably with the Russian team stalling the EBU till the master files could be sent to the laptop and a master-CD burned in front of Jon Ola Sand's eyes.

The fact that this is a pedestrian number can probably be forgiven, because it's a pedestrian little number that was potentially written, recorded, produced, and delivered in a single weekend. That's dedication. It's not a guarantee of greatness, but perhaps the Russian team also got the unspoken 'we want the 60th show to be somewhere other than Russia'.

Samantha says...

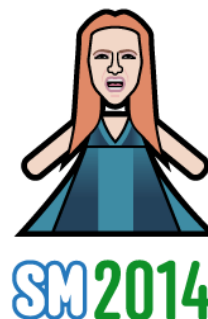
In a year where seemingly all eyes are on Russia, it was pretty smart for the network to bring the Tolmachevy Sisters and their international team (Russian/Greek songwriters, Swedish/Maltese lyricsists, Swedish/Portuguese backing vocalists) into the fray. You can't pin the nation's image problem on a pair of angelic-looking teenagers (and 2006 Junior Eurovision champions) who can't even legally vote yet, can you? That leaves us with the song: somewhat underwhelming by Eurovision standards, but capably performed by the twins. Is this a case of Russia phoning it in, or making a shrewd psychopolitical move?

Sharleen says...

In a year where Russia politically has offended many, this song achieves the very opposite effect - its inoffensive to the point of annoyance. One would have hoped after the country keeping its announcement and song reveal till the very last moment that they had some great trick up their sleeves, and upon hearing for the very first time led to nothing. There is no magic, no particular hook, no great 'moment'. Shine is neither good nor bad, and the Tolmachevy twins have already proven in the past (see JESC 2006) to be better than this, and deserve better than this middling pop song. However, like a black hole they will somehow suck enough points in to make it to the final, only to have the twins 'rising sun' collapse on itself at the final.

Your Notes

San Marino



At a Glance

Song: Maybe (Forse)
Artist: Valentina Monetta
Composer: Ralph Siegel
Lyricist: Mauro Balestri
Performing: Semi 1, 12th

About the Artist

Valentina Monetta was born on the 1st of March, 1975 in the Republic of San Marino.

Starting from 1995, she has been working with the best local musicians, becoming a versatile singer with a great talent for improvisation; her voice is both colorful and versatile, ranging from jazz to melodic Italian, from soul to R&B and pop.

Monetta's artistic versatility has allowed her to deal with varied work experience as a singer, actress and presenter, and she even composed the music and written the lyrics to her first solo album, a celebratory work of personal and professional balance, releasing the CD *Il Mio Gioco Preferito* recorded with the trio My Funky Valentine.

In 1995, Monetta started an adventure with her first band Tiberio, and soon thereafter formed the Parafunky. She was also part of the group 2Black, as well as forming the female vocal duo Harem'B. In 2002, with the project Charme, she released the single *Sharp*, and collaborated with the band Bluesmobile.

In March 2012 she worked with Fabrizio Raggi staging the show *Ma Che Differenza Fa*, a tribute to Ornella Vanoni in which Monetta shows her singing and acting talent.

In August 2012, still directed by Raggi, she was the protagonist of *Camelia*, a musical commissioned by UNICEF, in which Valentina presented her songs together with covers of some great Italian singers and songwriters. Her most recent experiences are all with her live band My Funky Valentine.

<http://www.facebook.com/valentinamonettaofficial>

San Marino in Eurovision

Appearances: 5
Debut: 2008
Victory: -
Best: 11th in semi final
- 2013: Crisilide, by Valentina Monetta, 11th in the semi with 47 points
Semi Finals: -

Recent History

2013: Crisilide, by Valentina Monetta, 11th in the semi with 47 points

2012: The Social Network Song, by Valentina Monetta 14th in the semi with 31 points

2011: Stand By, by Senit, 16th in the semi with 34 points

2014 National Final

On 19 June 2013, SMtv San Marino announced that it had contracted Valentina Monetta to represent San Marino for a third consecutive year. The Sammarinese entry, "Maybe (Forse)", was presented during a special presentation program on 14 March 2014.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Here we go again, the third year on the trot that San Marino has turned to Ralph Siegel to try and get them out of the semi-finals. For the record, in his long Eurovision career Siegel has qualified from exactly zero semi-finals. Yes., there's a victory thirty years ago but then Finland are going to be trading on Lordi's win until Krista Siegfrieds comes back with a delicate duet on divorce in 2049.

It's great San Marino turn up, and it's great that they're showing faith once more in Valentine Monetta, a singer who has delivered them their greatest result (11th) in the contest. But could someone tell Siegel that Monetta is a Jazz singer? These eighties infused bubblegum ditties are killing her reputation

Samantha says...

Valentina Monetta is giving Eurovision her third consecutive try, which means that either she's incredibly determined or that San Marino has run out of other singers. Huge swaths of the fan community are rooting for Valentina to make it to the Finals for the first time, but in such a competitive year, this might not do her voice justice. The problem here is not Valentina and her abilities, it's the fact that she's continually saddled with songs that aren't the right fit for her. Yes, Ralph Siegel's a big name in Eurovision circles, but he hasn't had a successful song since 1999. Valentina has insinuated that three times is enough for her, but I would have liked to have seen her come back with a song in the bluesy-jazz vein that she's veered towards in her non-Siegel work.

Sharleen says...

In a contest year filled with powerhouse female voices, Valentina has once again been drawn the raw deal for Eurovision. Her choice to go down the Bond soundalike tune has been outdone by Austria, her voice will be overshadowed by Moldova performing before her in the semi. 'Maybe' its third time lucky and a qualification for San Marino? Not on the cards.

Your Notes

Slovenia



At a Glance

Song: Round and Round (Spet)
Artist: Tinkara Kovac
Composer: Raay
Lyricist: Tinkara Kovač, Hannah Mancini, Tina Piš
Performing: Semi 2, 14th

About the Artist

Tinkara Kovač is a musician, singer, professional flautist and music and lyricist. Since her first single *Veter z juga*/Wind from the South, Tinkara first recorded two albums with ZKP RTV Slovenija Records (*Ne odhaja poletje*/Summer Doesn't Bid Goodbye and *Košček neba*/A Piece of Sky). Tinkara Kovač has in her 15 years of active music career received numerous awards (First Prize at the 1997 Melodies of the Sea and the Sun festival in Portorož, Slovenia, 8 Golden Roosters in 1998, Gold and Platinum awards for all of her albums. She was the runner-up at the 1999 Eurovision Song Contest pre-selection in Slovenia, the best video-clip and song at the 2000 TV MP3 NOW contest in London, her original music *Reason Why* was amongst the top ten at the 2003 ISC contest)

Together with numerous and diverse music bands, Tinkara had played more than 800 gigs in Slovenia, Croatia, Austria and Italy. For her, her most prominent international collaborations on stage or in the studio were those with Ian Anderson (Jethro Tull), Robert Plant (Led Zeppelin), Carlos Nuñez, Dan Lavery, Massimo Bubola, Bungaro and Paul Millns.

<https://www.facebook.com/tinkara.kovac>

Slovenia in Eurovision

Appearances: 20
Debut: 1993
Victory: -
Best: 7th
- 1995: Prisluhni mi by Darja Švajger, with 84 points
- 2001: Energy by Nuša Derenda, with 70 points
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2007, 2011

Recent History

2013: Straight Into Love, by Hannah, 16th with 8 points

2012: Verjamem, by Eva Boto, 17th with 31 points

2011: No One, by Maja Keuc, 13th with 96 points

2014 National Final

EMA 2014 was the eighteenth edition of the Slovenian national final format Evrovizijska Melodija (EMA). The competition took place at RTVSLO Studio 1 in Ljubljana on 8 March 2014 and was hosted by Ula Furlan. The winning song and artist was determined in two rounds of public televoting - first to select the top two, and then to select the winner. In the first round "Spet/Round and Round" performed by Tinkara Kovač and "Let Me Be (Myself)" performed by Muff qualified to the superfinal. In the superfinal "Spet/Round and Round" performed by Tinkara Kovač was selected as the winner.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

It's co-written by last year's Slovenian singer Hanna Mancini.
I think that says it all.

Samantha says...

At first, I didn't know what to make of "Spet/Round and Round". It's pretty, but not incredibly catchy. It's elegant, but not stuffy. It's not a ballad, but it's not quite danceable, either. But there's something so intriguing about "Spet" that I can't quite put my finger on. It's a bit pop, a touch new-age, but co-written by Hannah Mancini, the woman who brought us a disco stomper that came in dead last place. Slovenia has tended to underperform next to its Balkan neighbors, but in a year where we lack Bosnia, Serbia, and Croatia, will more of the diaspora look towards Ljubljana?

Sharleen says...

An in-offensive number in itself does nothing for Slovenias' chances normally. Suddenly though, placed in a semi of potential red-hot messes and other countries with poor track records, a flute, a couple of good looking girls in floaty dresses and a semi-decent hook might give them a chance to scrap into the final where it will not trouble any other competitors on the Saturday night.

Your Notes

Spain



ES 2014

At a Glance

Song: Dancing In The Rain
Artist: Ruth Lorenzo
Composer: Ruth Lorenzo, James Lawrence Irvin, Julian Emery
Lyricist: Ruth Lorenzo, James Lawrence Irvin, Julian Emery
Performing: (finalist, position tba)

About the Artist

At twelve years old Ruth and her family left Murcia (south east Spain) and moved to the United States. There, Ruth took every music, theatre, dance and choir lesson going on. She was put into competitions and played the lead roles in *The Phantom of the Opera* and *My Fair Lady*, developing her singing and stage skills.

In 2008 she decided to try out auditioning for The X Factor. "I had to come to England to try and achieve my dreams". Ruth is a fighter, and she made it all the way through until coming fifth in the competition giving some outstanding and breathtaking performances such as Bon Jovi's *Always*, Bob Dylan's *Knocking on Heaven's Door* and Prince's *Purple Rain* were an instant Internet sensation (over 100 million YouTube hits) .

<https://www.facebook.com/ruthlorenzo1>

Spain in Eurovision

Appearances: 54
Debut: 1961
Victory: 2
- 1968: La La La by Massiel, with 29 points
- 1969: Vivo Cantando by Salome, with 18 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Auto-qualify (Big 5)

Recent History

2013: Contigo Hasta El Final, by ESDM, 25th with 8 points
2012: Quédate Conmigo, by Pastora Soler, 10th with 97 points
2011: Que Me Quiten Lo Bailao, by Lucia Perez, 23rd with 50 points

2014 National Final

On 20 January 2014, TVE announced that it would organise a national final in order to select the Spanish entry for the Eurovision Song Contest 2014. The five competing acts and the titles of their entries were announced officially on 20 January. The winner was selected by a combination of televoting (50%) and jury voting (50%). The jury panel that accounted for 50% of the votes consisted of singers David Bustamante, Merche and Mónica Naranjo. Brequette and Ruth Lorenzo tied with the same amount of points, but Ruth Lorenzo won due to the televoting results prevailing according to the rules.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

To the delight of British fans, X-Factor reject Ruth Lorenzo is heading to Eurovision (fellow Contestant from that year Eoghan Quigg thankfully failed to get through the Irish Eurosong bloodbath). While many singers are laying claim to the 'full throated female ballad' this year, Lorenzo will have the largest lungs in the arena and should walk away with that trophy.

As long as she doesn't fall to the temptation to over-sing a rather weak song. If only she was going with 'Mas', the song that finished second in the Spanish National Final...

Samantha says...

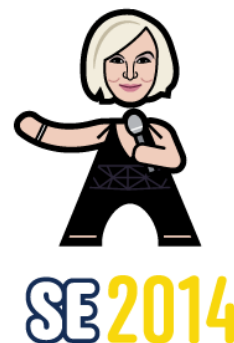
A familiar face to viewers of reality TV, Ruth is as versatile as she is talented; during a preview event in London, she not only performed her Eurovision entry, but she also belted out "Purple Rain" and a stellar rendition of "Nessun Dorma". If there's any voice in the contest that has the capability to handle a massive, dramatic ballad like "Dancing in the Rain", it's Ruth's. But huge ballads aren't the lock for victory that they used to be, even if the vocals are stellar. During the National Final, Ruth's intensity almost veered towards looking slightly unhinged. If she can rein that in, she has the potential to do quite well.

Sharleen says...

I find the song and singer compelling to listen to and watch, but some of those notes delivered really do have me reaching for the remote control volume button. For me personally, this is another screechy and screamy chorus outing from a Spanish diva, ala Pastora Soler 2011. Ruth does have an additional benefit of being known amongst the British (and likely) Irish voters to grab some high scores, and she should do reasonably well amongst the other Western countries voting. I doubt the juries across Europe will be raining on her parade either. With that, precedence tells us that a top 10 result is not a bad call.

Your Notes

Sweden



At a Glance

Song: Undo
Artist: Sanna Nielsen
Composer: Fredrik Kempe, David Kreuger, Hamed "K-One" Pirouzpanah
Lyricist: Fredrik Kempe, David Kreuger, Hamed "K-One" Pirouzpanah
Performing: Semi 1, 3rd

About the Artist

Sanna Nielsen, 29, broke through as an artist at the early age of 11 and is today one of Sweden's most famous pop artists. Sanna has managed to reach the finals all seven times she participated in the Swedish national selection and was only a few points from winning in 2008. Despite finishing runner up, the song *Empty Room* was a massive success and Sanna held the first place on the Swedish charts 24 weeks in a row.

Sanna's career as a singer and performer began back in 1992 when she starred in her first talent show. It was followed by several more which in turn led to TV appearances and the #1 hit *Till en fågel*. She is still the youngest artist ever to hold a #1 position on the charts.

<http://www.facebook.com/svtmelodifestivalen>

Sweden in Eurovision

Appearances: 54
Debut: 1958
Victory: 5
- 1974: Waterloo by ABBA, with 24 points
- 1984: Diggiloo Diggiley by The Herreys, with 145 points
- 1991: Fångad av en stormvind by Carola, with 146 points
- 1999: Take Me To Your Heaven by Charlotte Nilsson, with 163 points
- 2012: Euphoria, by Loreen, with 372 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2004-2009, 2011, 2012

Recent History

2013: You, by Robin Stjernberg, 14th with 62 points
2012: Euphoria, by Loreen, 1st with 372 points
2011: Popular, by Eric Saade, 3rd with 185 points

2014 National Final

Once again the massive Melodifestivalen took place from 1 February – 8 March, with 32 entries competing. 2 entries per semi of 4 directly qualified to final, and another 2 entries qualified to 2nd chance round where they went through sudden death rounds. The final 10 entries at the final competed via international juries and a percentile scored televote selection. Ace Wilder won the jury vote, however Sanna won the televote with just 9 points over Sanna, and clinching a victory with just a total of 2 points.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

If Ace Wilder had went to Andra Chansen, with another week of publicity and airtime just a few more Swedish voters would have fallen in love with her, and we'd be contemplating a return to Stockholm. As it was, Sanna's popularity was enough to push a standard Melodifestivalen ballad through instead of a sure-fire Ibiza club hit.

It's Lena Phillipsson all over again. Over-wrought ballad, not enough substance in the music, and with the best of intentions, Sanna looks a bit too mumsie to pick up enough votes to gain a victory. Top Ten, yes. But this is not as strong as the fans hope it is.

Samantha says...

After six unsuccessful attempts at Melodifestivalen (the Swedish National Final that draws higher local viewing figures than Eurovision itself), it was seventh time lucky for Sanna Nielsen, who will take the trip across the Øresund to Copenhagen. Well-known (and well-loved) in Eurofan circles, Sanna brings us an emotional ballad written by Frederik Kempe, himself no stranger to the ESC sphere. Sweden has Eurovision almost down to a science, with the nearly-uncanny ability to balance song, singer, universality and geography. But what wins Eurovision: formulas or heart? As for me, I find this cold and clinical, and while it's certainly a pretty song, it doesn't connect with me on any sort of emotional level.

Sharleen says...

This country is a perennial favourite with fans and early betting which currently suggests its 2nd favourite to win the contest. Let's remove the history of Sanna actually trying through Melodifestivalen so many times to make Eurovision and rank the song/performance as a stand-alone though? Would this be called a contender? I don't believe so. Even the Swedes haven't supported the song in the charts after their selections. Undo is at best, a plodding ballad that is delivered adequately and is utterly forgotten 2 minutes after it is finished. It should qualify this year to final with fewer entries to compete against, but will likely find itself lingering towards the bottom on Saturday.

Your Notes

Switzerland



At a Glance

Song: Hunter of Stars
Artist: Sebalter
Composer: Sebastiano Paù-Lessi
Lyricist: Sebastiano Paù-Lessi
Performing: Semi 2, 12th

About the Artist

The 28-year-old, whose real name is Sebastiano Paù-Lessi, lives in the Italian-speaking canton of Ticino. As an 18-year-old Sebalter had his first career break, it was again thanks to his faithful fiddle. Sebalter's versatile and energetic playing propelled him on a 10-year musical ride as co-frontman of a well-known country-folk band based in Switzerland.

In 2012 - after four albums, more than three hundred live performances, and playing in front of crowds of more than 10,000 people - Sebalter felt his teenage songwriting itch coming back with a vengeance. He decided to close one wonderful career chapter and open a new one as a solo artist. He immediately started writing and recording songs, searching for the perfect sound that would provide a balance between his folk roots, his poetic sensibilities and his live-on-stage energy. After a year of intense work, he knew he had found it - and he decided to put it to the test by entering the Eurovision Song Contest.

Switzerland in Eurovision

Appearances: 55
Debut: 1956
Victory: 2
- 1956: Refrain, by Lys Assia
- 1988: Ne partez pas sans moi, by Celine Dion, with 137 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified 2005, 2006, 2011

Recent History

2013: You and Me, by Takasa, 13th in the semi with 41 points
2012: Unbreakable, by Sinplus, 11th in the semi with 45 points
2011: In Love For a While, by Anna Rossinelli, 25th with 19 points

2014 National Final

Die Große Entscheidungsshow took place on 1 February 2014 at the Bodensee Arena in Kreuzlingen, hosted by Sven Epiney. The show consisted of two parts: in the first part the six candidate songs that were in contention to represent Switzerland were performed and in the second part each candidate performed a cover version of another song. The winner was determined by the combination of televoting (50%) and the votes of an expert jury (50%).

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

The whistling is back. I'm struggling to recall a Eurovision song that has done well with a whistle. 'Winds of Change' aside I'm struggling to think of any mainstream pop song that has succeeded with a whistle as a major part.

It's also not Sebalter's problem. Listening to the studio version of this song, I find myself enjoying the whole package. But when the live version, be it from the preview shows or the Swiss National Final and Sebalter's dialog - without studio mixing and support - is muddy at best. It's a wonderful song but you need to stop focusing on the words and enjoy it as a whole... which Sebalter hasn't yet delivered in a live environment.

Samantha says...

There's something just so disarmingly charming about Sebalter. He's a cheek-pinchingly adorable, fiddle-playing, catchy-tune-composing performer who's actually a lawyer when he's not indulging his musical side. I'm honestly surprised my mother isn't begging me to date him. Oh, yes, and the song's not bad, either. Out of the 37 songs that I played for my friends at my annual Preview Party, this was the only one that got people physically engaged, clapping and whistling along. In a competition where most viewers only hear the songs once, hooks like that can make a world of difference.

Sharleen says...

Eurovision is not a contest for cheeky, whistling chappies - if it was, Sebalter wins my heart and the event hands down. Alas, its a song contest, and with lyrics I can barely understand through his manic singing, I can't see Hunter of Stars not reaching any type of height on Thursday, let alone the stratosphere at the Saturday final.

Your Notes

The Netherlands



At a Glance

Song: Calm After The Storm
Artist: The Common Linnets
Composer: Ilse DeLange, JB Meijers, Rob Crosby,
Matthew Crosby, Jake Etheridge
Lyricist: Ilse DeLange, JB Meijers, Rob Crosby,
Matthew Crosby, Jake Etheridge
Performing: Semi 1, 14th

About the Artist

The Common Linnets is a Dutch dream team consisting of Ilse DeLange and Waylon. These two singer-songwriter stars have together found a new and exciting challenge in expressing their love for country music.

Ilse and Waylon have known each other since they were teenagers, when they both played the country music circuit in Holland. Right from the beginning they shared a love for country and related genres like bluegrass, folk and Americana. But most of all they shared a passion for true, stripped-down songs that convey pure emotion. That passion led to the formation of The Common Linnets.

<https://www.facebook.com/thecommonlinnets>

The Netherlands in Eurovision

Appearances: 55
Debut: 1956
Victory: 4
- 1957: Net als toen by Corry Brokken, with 31 points
- 1959: Een beetje by Teddy Scholten, with 21 points
- 1969: De troubadour by Lenny Kuhr, with 18 points
- 1975: Ding-A-Dong by Teach-In, with 152 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2004, 2013

Recent History

2013: Birds, by Anouk, 9th with 114 points
2012: You and Me, by Joan Franka, 15th with 35 points
2011: Never Alone, by 3Js, 19th in the semi with 13 points

2014 National Final

On 5 November 2013, AVROTROS announced that the artist that would represent the Netherlands in Copenhagen would be revealed during a press conference on 25 November 2013 at the Wisseloord Studios in Hilversum. At the press conference, The Common Linnets, were presented as the Dutch representatives for the 2014 contest.

On 4 March 2014 during the Dutch talk show *De Wereld Draait Door*, it was revealed that the title of the Dutch entry would be "Calm After The Storm". The song was presented in its acoustic version on 12 March 2014 during a broadcast of *De Wereld Draait Door*. The official version of the song was premiered on 13 March 2014 during the radio programme *Gouden Uren*.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Eurovision doesn't do country and western, which is lucky for Ilse and Waylon, because if the competition at large knew anything about the genre they would know that this is a tired, insipid, shadow of a number. Head out to Nashville and you'll find countless male/female duets, enough 'life and love is kinda hard' material to fill every Eurovision National Final... twice... and the majority of them would be far more polished and believable than The Common Linnets.

Quite simply, when I watch them on stage I do not believe they are, or could ever be, a couple. And once you lose that belief, you're not going to be able to do country.

Samantha says...

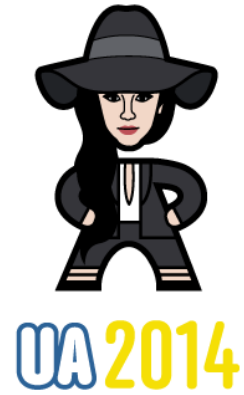
So, would it be a total cliché for the lone American of the group to say how much she loves this country-kissed duet? Oh, well, I'll say it anyway. "Calm After the Storm" is straightforward, elegant, unpretentious, and performed by two experienced professionals who have known each other since they were kids. But does subtlety really fly at Eurovision? Normally, I'd say "no", but look at the recent success of "Kedvesem", "Me and My Guitar", and even "Et s'il fallait le faire". In a year as open as this is, this could be a shock on the scoreboard.

Sharleen says...

If this was the Sharleen-Vision contest, I would give this lovely country toe-tapper a top 5 billing. I want to blare it out my car window on a breezy Sunday afternoon drive. Its such a chilled vibe though in what is a slow-burning second half of semi 1 that I fear its gonna either send the viewing public to sleep or off to make a cup of tea. After such a hopeful return to contest form in 2013, this song will demonstrate that its not just simply song-quality that makes a good entry.

Your Notes

Ukraine



At a Glance

Song: Tick Tock
Artist: Mariya Yaremchuk
Composer: Mariya Yaremchuk
Lyricist: Mariya Yaremchuk, Sandra Bjurman
Performing: Semi 1, 9th

About the Artist

Mariya Yaremchuk was born on March 2nd, 1993 in Chernivtsi into a musicians' family. Her father, Nazariy Yaremchuk, is a true Ukrainian legend, who died when Maria was only two years old.

In 2009 she entered the Variety Vocal Department of the Kyiv Circus and Variety Arts Academy and simultaneously the History, Politology and Foreign Relations Department of the Chernivtsi National University. In 2013 she had graduated with honour and got the bachelor's degrees in both specialisations. Mariya continues her studies for the master's degrees.

In 2012 Mariya Yaremchuk participated in the Ukrainian version of *The Voice*, a famous global TV format for the best vocalists where she reached the fourth place.

<https://www.facebook.com/mariyayaremchukofficial>

Ukraine in Eurovision

Appearances: 12
Debut: 2003
Victory: 1
- Wild Dances by Ruslana, with 280 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2004-2013

Recent History

2013: Gravity, Zlata Ognevich, 3rd with 214 points
2012: Be My Guest, by Gaitana, 15th with 65 points
2011: Angel, by Mika Newton, 4th with 159 points

2014 National Final

The televised national final took place in Kiev on 21 December 2013 where the combination of votes from a professional jury and SMS votes from the viewing audience selected Ukraine's representative in Copenhagen. Mariya won both the televote and jury, over her second placed rival Victoria Petryk, who had graduated from Junior Eurovision representation.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

I really don't know why Ukraine bother with a national Final. There's always one song that has clearly had the effort put in to it, one or two domestic names of note to bulk up the audience with misfiring songs, and they go and change the winning song beyond almost all recognition. Just go for an internal selection all the way, rather than to 95%, and be done with it.

As for the song... it was interesting in December, but now it's sub-Katy Perry dance-along with a bit of gender-bending fashion. Seen it all before, many times, and that doesn't impress me much any more.

Samantha says...

For those of you who crave a "typical Eurovision song" (that is, high-energy arrangement, gorgeous performer, and the potential for metaphorical and literal fireworks), "Tick Tock" might be just what you're looking for. I hated this when it first came out (with an opening line like "we belong to each other/like a sister to a brother", all I could do was cringe), but Ukraine has the unique ability to revamp, tighten, and polish rough songs into over-the-top, outlandish, guilty-pleasure entries that you often hate to love.

Sassy, cheeky, confident...this may become the "sing-into-your-hairbrush-when-nobody's-watching" song of 2014.

Sharleen says...

If there is one thing Ukraine can be relied upon, its making the most of whatever they have each year, transforming a potentially average song in any other countries hands into something memorable. We saw that with Mika in 2011, and with Maria, they have made some slight lyrical changes, boosted the dancebeat, and at least given us something to get the blood pumping in the middle of a slow, and let's say, dull section of the first semi. Granted, its the poorest song sent since Ukraine debuted, but it still has 'something' (potentially her charm more than anything). Watch it qualify confidently to Saturday, and then likely find its way to the middle of the table much to the surprise of many viewers.

Your Notes

United Kingdom



At a Glance

Song: Children of the Universe
Artist: Molly
Composer: Molly Smitten-Downes & Anders Hansson
Lyricist: Molly Smitten-Downes & Anders Hansson
Performing: (finalist, position tba)

About the Artist

Molly grew up in Leicestershire, a small county in the heart of England. As a child Molly would write poems and soon realised they had in fact become song lyrics. Molly went on to study music at college and in 2008 scored her first UK top ten hit with *Raindrops*, a collaboration with superstar DJ Sash! In 2012 Molly won best Urban/Pop act at Live and Unsigned, a highly regarded UK Contest for unsigned artists and acts. 2013 brought in more success as Molly was awarded winner of 'Best Song' at the Best of British Unsigned Music Awards for her original track *Lost Generation*. In 2014 the BBC's Eurovision team discovered Molly through BBC Introducing, an initiative designed for unsigned acts and artists who would like to get their original tracks heard on BBC Radio.

<https://www.facebook.com/officialmolly>

United Kingdom in Eurovision

Appearances: 57
Debut: 1957
Victory: 5
- 1967: Puppet on a String by Sandie Shaw, with 47 points
- 1969: Boom Bang a Bang by Lulu, with 18 points
- 1976: Save Your Kisses For Me by Brotherhood of Man, with 164 points
- 1981: Making Your Mind Up by Bucks Fizz, with 136 points
- 1997: Love Shine a Light by Katrina and The Waves, with 227 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Auto-qualify (Big 5)

Recent History

2013: Believe in Me, by Bonnie Tyler, 19th with 23 points
2012: Love Will Set You Free, by Engelbert Humperdinck, 25th with 12 points
2011: I Can, by Blue, 11th with 100 points

2014 National Final

On 28 February 2014, the executive producer of Eurovision for the BBC Guy Freeman announced in his blog that the British artist and song would be revealed on 3 March 2014 at 19:30 on the BBC Red Button service by semi-finals commentator Scott Mills. Eurovision.tv also broadcast the show for viewers across the world. On 3 March 2014, the BBC announced that Molly Smitten-Downes, as her artist name Molly, would represent the United Kingdom with the song "Children of the Universe".

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Something has changed at the BBC. After the last few years of poor overall results from 'has-beens' Blue, Engelbert Humperdinck, and Bonnie Tyler, they have decided to go for a new approach with new artists, and a fresh look at the Contest.

The change is nothing to do with the fact that the BBC was blamed for the poor result last year, and not the performer as they were in previous years.

No matter the back-room fun, the UK now has Molly (wisely dropping the double-barrelled surname Smitten-Downe) with the beginnings of a hands in the air anthem. Part of me wished that the lyrics and composition had received a quick polish pass from an old wizened pop wizard (or Butch Walker, if he's available), the part of me is glad that Molly has full control of the whole smash - that'll help get a good crop in for 2015.

Now all we need to do is avoid a poor result and we can get a decent pub-punk band from Bristol in the frame for next year.

Samantha says...

My first Eurovision was 2011, when all eyes were on Blue, only to have British hopes crushed by a few naff notes in the Jury Final that the public audience didn't even see. Now, for the first time since then, there's been an actual buzz about the UK taking home not only a Top 10 spot, but a potential win. I have to tip my hat to the BBC for choosing an exciting, intriguing song that's not only of high quality, but actually relevant in today's music scene; a change in direction was sorely needed. She's got a unique quality to her voice that fits the song very well, and there's something to be said for a big, bold, powerhouse anthem. If she gets the Copenhagen audience as energized as the did for her London unveiling, I wouldn't put a top 5 placement past the UK.

Sharleen says...

And in the latest attempt to re-capture the contest, United Kingdom have thrown away the list of has-beens and instead looked back on 1997 for inspiration in terms of song itself. Anthemic sounding-song won before for UK, why not again? Whilst there is certainly nothing wrong in the vocal abilities or the talent of Molly per se, the song and performance itself is too much of a mix of genres and tempo to ever really take the audience on a full 3-minute journey to pick up the phone. Is it a protest tune? Is it a ballad? Is it a piece of floaty hippie pop? I'm confused, and I think the votes on Saturday might be all over the shop too.

Your Notes